

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Relationship with theory

**A study exploring the impact of theory on the way trainee counselling psychologists make sense of their emotional responses to clients in practice**

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**Relationship with theory:**

**A study exploring the impact of theory on the way trainee counselling psychologists make sense of their emotional responses to clients in practice.**

**by**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
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(PsychD)

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## Abstract

The theoretical component of professional training for counselling psychologists is recognised, if not assumed, to be important by those in the field. Currently, several models of therapy are taught to trainees, each with its own theoretical approach to understanding and working in the therapeutic setting. This study considered the helpfulness of theory in practice and explored this with the research question ‘how do trainees make sense of their emotional responses to clients in practice, and what is the impact of theory on the way they make sense of this experience’. Twelve counselling psychologists in the final stages of training participated in semi-structured interviews with the researcher. A grounded theory analysis found eight categories in total. The overarching category, ‘*the trainee’s relationship with theory*’, indicated that theoretical learning was a social process that became incorporated into trainees’ developing professional identities, and that it evolved during the course of their training. The impacts of theory were found to be both helpful and problematic, and identifiable in four categories: ‘*theory reveals the trainee’s experience*’, ‘*theory conceals the trainee’s experience*’, ‘*theory raises uncertainty in the trainee*’, and, ‘*the trainee’s inability to perceive the impact of theory*’. The remaining three categories ‘*the trainee’s personal and professional development*’, ‘*the nature of the trainee’s relationships*’, and ‘*relieving the impact of the trainee’s experience*’ described factors influencing trainees’ relationship with theory, and the degree to which each impact category was experienced. The research findings open dialogue about: the disadvantages (alongside the advantages) of using one’s reflective practice. These implications are discussed.



# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introducing the research

This four-part chapter introduces the reader to this research, entitled ‘relationship with theory: a study exploring the impact of theory on the way trainee counselling psychologists make sense of their emotional responses to clients in practice’. This will include: the purpose of the research; an overview of the forthcoming chapters with a summary of the findings; brief discussion about the fundamental features of the study, including the terms used and topic areas covered; and finally, an experiential account of how the research question was developed, which enables the reader to place the researcher and research into some context.

### 1.2 Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research was to study the impact of theory on experience by exploring the way trainee counselling psychologists made sense of their experiences of having emotional responses to clients in their practice. This research was undertaken in order to explore the idea that using theory can be problematic as well as helpful in practice (Gadamer, n.d.; Heidegger, 1943/1998; Rogers, 1951; Moustakas, 1990; van Deurzen, 1998; Stone, 2001; Evans & Gilbert, 2005; Cayne & Loewenthal, 2008).

The study attended to three important issues for trainees concerning reflective practice (see 1.4.1) and ethical and effective practice as a counselling psychologist.

These issues included the impact of experiencing emotional responses on trainees, the

impact of applying a theory and/or having learnt a number of different theories that might be applied to their experiences in practice, and, the absence of knowledge about trainees' process of knowing in practice.

The idea explored and issues identified are addressed in the aims of the research. These are, firstly, to add to what is known about becoming a counselling psychologist in relation to this aspect of emotional experience in practice; secondly, to explore what impact theories that trainees learn during their training had on the way trainees made sense of this aspect of clinical work; and thirdly, to find out about how trainee counselling psychologists' theoretical knowledge can feature in their processing of their practice. It was the researcher's intention to add to our understanding about how theory and experience can inter-relate, and make a contribution to the nature of counselling psychology knowledge.

### **1.3 Summary of chapters**

Before discussing aspects of the study in detail, such as how the research aims were employed, an overview of this piece of work is given. This section outlines something of the content and structure that can be expected from each of the five chapters that follow this introduction; these include the methodology, method, findings, literature review, and discussion chapters.

#### **1.3.1 Chapter two: Methodology**

In the next chapter, methodology is introduced and considerations around reflexivity are discussed. The suitability of the chosen methodology, grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), is considered alongside other qualitative methodologies that might have been used for this inquiry, but were discounted. These include heuristics (Moustakas, 1990),

hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1960/1975, 1976), discourse analysis (Foucault, 1972), and phenomenology (Husserl, 1913). The researcher puts forward her case for using grounded theory for this particular area of research, and acknowledges the different approaches to grounded theory in order to demonstrate why constructivist grounded theory was considered most appropriate.

### 1.3.2 Chapter three: Method

This chapter will take the reader through the processes and procedures of initial sampling, recruitment, interviewing and data collection, theoretical sampling, and the stages of data analysis. To clarify the process of grounded theory analysis, examples of initial and focussed coding are shown, and also some memos are included to demonstrate how the categories were constructed.

Procedures were guided by grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006) and were in accordance with the researcher's training institution, Roehampton University, and British Psychological Society (BPS) research guidelines. Justifications for the choice of participants, and ethical considerations, also feature in this chapter.

### 1.3.3 Chapter four: Findings

This chapter presents the reader with the grounded theory findings. A table summarises the findings with statements from the transcribed interview data to illustrate the origin of the themes seen in the category properties and categories, and then each of the eight categories are described in greater depth.

The study findings, in summary, were that participating trainees had a relationship with theory (main category) that was developing over time and was influenced by a number of important factors present in the categories: *the trainee's personal and professional development* and *the nature of the trainee's relationships*. The properties

of these categories, respectively include *it takes time for the trainee to incorporate theory into their practice*, *the trainee learns to trust their own experience*, *the trainee's grasp of the counselling psychology ethos*, and also, *the trainee's relationship with their role models*, *the trainee's relationship with their client*, and *the trainee's relationship with their family of origin*. Another relevant theme that became a category described the way theory was used as a way of *relieving the impact of the trainee's experience*.

*The trainee's relationship with theory* was understood to indicate how they were impacted by theory, and four of the categories described these different impacts. Sometimes a theory was revealing, helping them to find meaning, a name for, and a way of working with their experience; sometimes it was concealing because it could replace their experience, limit the meaning that could be made from it, and/or the trainee expressed criticisms about theory. Sometimes a theory raised uncertainty due to conflicting information, because it was not yet understood, or because it was unclear whether the emotional response concerned the trainee or the client. Finally, sometimes the trainee was unable to perceive any impact because theory was inseparable from their way of making sense of their experience, theory and their experience were difficult to think about at the same time, and/or because their awareness of when they were using theory was limited. Findings will be further explicated within the chapter.

### 1.3.4 Chapter five: Literature Review

The fifth chapter discusses a broad array of existing literature and research that is relevant to the research topic in order to develop the findings from the grounded theory analysis. This chapter follows the findings chapter so that the grounded theory can direct the literature that is reviewed in order to reduce the degree to which known literature biases the researcher before data analysis occurs. This practice is recommended by grounded theory co-founder Barney Glaser (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and its usefulness is considered in the discussion chapter. Following an introduction to this chapter, it is organised into five subsections which include two broad areas, background and context of counselling psychology, and, becoming a counselling psychologist; then, three study-specific areas, making sense of experience, the experience: emotional responses in practice, and theory.

### 1.3.5 Chapter six: Discussion

In this closing chapter the study findings are revisited, and the research process is reviewed in stages, highlighting queries, problems and limitations. Issues regarding the findings are discussed, for example, the researcher's caution concerning how much of her experience featured in the construction of the categories, and overlap between some of the categories. Areas discussed as part of the research process include the ontology-epistemology relationship in the research, the competing areas of the study, the assimilation of new research paradigms, and also more methodological issues around reflexivity, sample and validity considerations, disadvantages of method choice, grounded theory techniques in practice, and the review of the literature in relation to the findings. Finally, implications of the findings are considered for

counselling psychology practice and training, and the chapter ends with suggestions for future research and concluding thoughts.

#### **1.4 Areas addressed by the research**

An introduction to the areas central to this research inquiry now give the reader some context and focus with which to appreciate the overview just provided by the summary of chapters. These key areas include the trainee counselling psychologist, making sense of experience, emotional responses, and theory.

##### **1.4.1 The trainee counselling psychologist**

It is necessary for a trainee counselling psychologist to develop as a practitioner who is ethical, competent and self-aware. There is some debate around how this should best be achieved in this and neighbouring disciplines (e.g. the importance of personal therapy, see Risq & Target, 2009; Darongkamas, Burton, & Cushway, 1994; Greenberg & Staller, 1981; Macaskill, 1988). However all would agree, as stated in the British Psychological Society code of ethics and conduct (BPS, 2006), that the principles of respect, competence, responsibility and integrity are of great importance; and arguably require self-awareness for practitioners to achieve and maintain.

Reflective practice is listed as one of the counselling psychology practitioners' responsibilities and obligations to self and society (BPS, 2005) and the researcher considers both awareness about the impact of our use of theory in practice, and, working with emotional responses to clients, important examples of where such reflection needs to be utilised for ethical and effective practice. Personal development, therefore, is of central importance for trainees, and the value of experiential learning

from supervision and their own personal therapy (Williams, Coyle & Lyons, 1999) should not be underestimated.

#### **1.4.2 Making sense of experience**

Making sense of experiences with clients is an inevitable task for the trainee counselling psychologist in practice. Making sense could equate with reason and logic, or understanding; and the etymological roots of the word 'sense' refer to meaning, the faculty of perceiving and feeling (Houghton Mifflin, 2000). Given its breadth of meaning, the expression 'making sense' was considered appropriate for use in this study, as it was deemed to be less associated with a particular theoretical modality than other terms. This was important because in order to study the impact of theory on how experience is made sense of, the researcher did not want to introduce theory unnecessarily or any assumptions about theory in relation to the participant's experience.

During the interviews, participants were asked to begin with describing an emotional response that they had experienced towards a client, reengaging them with their experience and potentially stirring ontological questions before being asked to think about and make sense of the experience. The researcher considered that capturing something of the participant's epistemology (both the making sense process generally and the impact of theory) might be unlikely without the former focus on the experience.

#### **1.4.3 Emotional responses**

The experience with which theory was investigated was the trainee's emotional responses in practice. In the context of this study, emotional responses were considered any form of emotion or feeling experienced with, or in relation to, a client.

Mosby (2010) considers an emotional response to be a “reaction to a particular intrapsychic feeling or feelings, accompanied by physiologic changes that may or may not be outwardly manifested but that motivate or precipitate some action or behavioural response” (p.454). The focus of this study however is not on the trainee’s action or behaviour that followed their emotional response, nor is it on the emotional response itself, but the way the experience was made sense of, and the involvement of theory in this.

Emotional responses towards clients occur frequently for the talking therapy practitioner in clinical practice (Kimerling, Zeiss & Zeiss, 2000), and very often the experience is considered something worthy of reflection and consideration for the therapeutic relationship (Greenberg & Paivio, 1997). However, some emotional responses can have an impact on the trainee, presenting them with concerns about how the experience is best thought about, responded to, or tolerated; and consequently, how this might affect the working relationship with their client (Stone, 2001). This experience is deserving of further investigation, and whilst guidance on how to understand or respond to the emotional response may come from a variety of sources, it is the role of theory that is of primary interest in this study.

#### **1.4.4 Theory**

Theory has been generally defined as “a set of ideas intended to explain something” and “the principles on which an activity is based” (Livingstone, 2008, p.688), therefore one can conclude that the purpose of theory is to make something comprehensible, and that it can be used to guide our actions. In exploring the impact of theory, that is, its effect or influence, the researcher hoped to learn something about the relationship between theory and experience generally, and more specifically, to observe the extent



to which theories were used by the participants in making sense of emotional responses to their clients, and how helpful this was to them. The study also considered the impact of having learnt more than one theory in practice. Counselling psychologists learn a minimum of two therapeutic models from different schools of thought and a multitude of different theories during their training (BPS, 2010). This presents them with any number of theory-led interpretations that might be applied to their clinical experiences, and this raises questions about what different theories offer, or do not offer that might add to or take away from the clinical work. Further, it raises the question of whether therapists need to be aware of how theory might impact them so that they might monitor the way they think about and apply themselves in practice with their clients.

Finally, given the type of experience attended to as part of this study, one theory in particular was anticipated to feature more frequently in participant's accounts, and that was the psychodynamic theory of countertransference. This theory also featured in relation to the researcher's experience, as will be described shortly, so it is given appropriate attention during the literature review.

### **1.5 Experiential account on the development of the research question**

As part of the researcher's BPS accredited training programme it was necessary to select an area of doctoral research that would be related to the practice of counselling psychology and be relational in nature. The permissible scope for the research was either: a) the evaluation of counselling psychological interventions in terms of their antecedents, impacts and outcomes; or b) the nature and social context of counselling psychology. The researcher was keen to undertake a qualitative inquiry exploring the

learning experience of the trainee counselling psychologist in relation to practice, qualifying option b).

Research interests were inspired by practice, in particular, gaps in the researcher's understanding concerning her part in the therapeutic relationship. This propagated ideas around responsibility for change, role confusion, and 'blind spots', and eventually it became possible to connect these ideas with a common thread of 'what belongs to whom in the therapeutic relationship'. The researcher recalled her confusion in practice as a trainee counselling psychologist before she realised she had a tendency to deny the existence of her own emotional responses when with clients. In time, with reflection and processing of this, her emotional responses to clients became more defined, and questions could be reflected upon: 'were these feelings from the researcher's personal life', 'were they her response to being with this particular client', 'could they be connected to this client's experience', or a combination of these things.

A significant point about this time in the researcher's training, was that the researcher had learnt only the person-centred theories with which to think about her emotional response experiences, so when equipped with an alternative, the psychoanalytic theory 'countertransference' (Freud, 1910), she had a new way of interpreting her experience that seemed to be enlightening and helpful. However, the researcher noted that holding this perspective simultaneously inhibited her from understanding her experience in other ways, e.g. viewing the emotional response experience as having one owner excluded the possibility that such an experience could be co-created between client and therapist, or have another origin e.g. Jung's (1959) collective unconscious. In addition, she noted that there was room for error and misinterpretation of one's experience within the constraints of countertransference theory, because feelings could be interpreted in different ways therefore any number of

meanings could be made and used as information about the client, or about the therapist. For the researcher, learning several different therapeutic modalities and theories had seemed to increase her confusion, because her experience was interpretable in more ways. Consequently, this encouraged an exploration of such experiences by investigating the impact of theories in this process.

A researcher's choice of research topic often has personal significance, be it conscious or unconscious (Etherington, 2004; Devereux, 1967). The researcher recognised that it was important to make transparent her interest, perspective and biases in undertaking this study, particularly because she herself was a counselling psychologist in the process of completing her own professional training. The research question that was developed is connected to the researcher's experience in practice, but it is also open enough to invite an array of different perspectives and experiences regarding theory and making sense of emotional responses. The research question used for this study was 'how do trainee counselling psychologists make sense of their emotional responses to clients, and what impact, if any, do theories have on the way they make sense of this experience'.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Methodology

#### 2.1 Introduction to methodology

As this research intends to make a contribution to counselling psychology knowledge by looking at the impact of theory on how trainees make sense of their emotional response experiences to clients, it would seem negligent not to consider also the impact of the chosen methodology on the phenomena studied (and vice versa). The way that an area of interest is researched is as well deserving of attention as the area of interest itself when conducting sound research, because different methods provide different ways of asking questions about the social world, and each has a unique way of understanding the issue it is researching and a different set of tools for accessing that understanding (Wadham, 2009).

To be clear on terminology, if methods are used as tools of scientific investigation, then this chapter addresses something of the principles determining how these tools are deployed and interpreted (American Heritage Dictionary, 1992). Methodology can also refer to a system of methods used in an activity or study (Livingstone, 2008) which is how grounded theory is considered by its proponents; in contrast, grounded theory methods refer to the procedures that grounded theorists' use (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). More broadly, methodology refers to how the inquirer goes about finding out whatever they believe can be known, and this will be constrained by the ontological position taken (the form and nature of reality or being), and the

epistemological position taken (the relationship between the knower and the known, or nature of knowledge).

In order to research the impact of theory on the way the participants made sense of experiences of having emotional responses towards clients, it was necessary to consider the sort of data that might be elicited from the trainee counselling psychologists when asked about this and the form this would take, and also the nature of the subject area. To begin with, quantitative and qualitative approaches to the research are considered, followed by a discussion of the role of reflexivity. The suitability of four alternative methodologies are explored in relation to the present research, and then grounded theory history, approaches to grounded theory in practice, and reasons for selecting grounded theory for this study are discussed.

## **2.2 Quantitative and qualitative approaches to research**

The main advantage of a quantitative approach to research is that it enables meaningful comparisons of responses across participants to be made, allowing findings to be generalizable to a population. Quantitative research tries to ensure a stable study design, including use of highly structured methods such as questionnaires, surveys and structured observation. In such methods, numerical values are assigned to responses so that variation in the studied phenomena can be quantified, statistically analysed, and used to predict causal relationships (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2001). Whilst a quantitative approach is well suited for research that addresses some similar topics with a similar participant group as the present study, such as MacLennan's (2008) work on 'theoretical orientation as a personality trait', there are number of reasons it was considered unsuitable for this research and these are discussed alongside MacLennan's work for illustrative purposes.

MacLennan's research helpfully demonstrates how the 'personal proclivities and personality traits' of psychologists practising psychological therapy can inform their 'theoretical identity' or chosen approach to practice, and that this identity serves to guide not only their client work but also acts as "a framework in which each therapist has grounded her world view" (p.v). MacLennan's use of questionnaires to gather this data had limitations e.g. "personality measures...[are] not sensitive enough to disentangle overlapping personality variables" (p.20), and so, were supplemented by a qualitative method, a semi-structured interview. This mixed method approach attempted to capture something personal about the therapists in different ways, and in comparison, the present study attempts to capture something personal about therapist's way of making sense of their experiences in the context of theoretical application (and identity); however, salient methodological differences exist. Firstly, in this study the researcher is inquiring about something that is quite complex, the theory-experience relationship is abstract and subtle in nature, and may take time to form and become comprehensible; no appropriate quantitative measure currently exists to record it and if one were designed it could lack validity and reliability because the phenomena is highly personal to each individual and difficult to report on. In any case, this study does not intend to produce generalizable findings but explore and describe those experiences of the individuals that participated. This difference is described by Charmaz (2006), "[w]hereas quantitative researchers want to use their data to make statistical inferences about their target populations, grounded theorists aim to fit their emerging theories with their data" (p.59). A second difficulty with using a quantitative method for the present study would be that the researcher would be unable to capture details or factors that underlie the phenomena (e.g. influencing factors), whereas with a qualitative method this is achievable. McLeod

(2001) explains that “[q]ualitative inquiry... produce[s] nuanced accounts that do justice to the experience of all those participating in the research” (p.1).

A further difference between the present study and the study that used a quantitative method, is the way participant’s ‘theoretical identity’ is understood. In MacLennan’s work, theoretical identity was the one theoretical approach to which each clinician was attached (and practised); in contrast, the participants of this study were known to work with more than one theoretical model, and this was an important element of the investigation into the impact of theory. McLeod (2001) reminds us that it is “essential to consider what researchers are trying to achieve when they do research, and how they position themselves in relation to philosophical and practical issues” (p. ix); although a fair comparison cannot be made between these two studies because of their differences in research question and other features, the areas where the studies meet in similarity (e.g. the connection between theory and world view in the psychologist) are informative.

Finally, the degree of flexibility in the study design for a qualitative compared with a quantitative approach is a notable difference between them, although it should be acknowledged that flexibility of a method does not equate with how scientifically rigorous it is. It is important to remember why we research and what we gain from doing so, for example McLeod (2001) suggests that qualitative research “can feed into a dialogue between practitioners and researchers” and “points to a gap in transmission between researchers and practitioners” (p.5). Orlans & Van Scoyoc (2009) see this gap as potentially perpetuating a lack of integration between research and practice in the field; which raises the question, are methods poorly suited to the phenomena being studied? The researcher supports Allport’s (1963) suggestion that “we should adapt our methods so far as we can to the object” and not “define the object in terms of our

faulty methods"(p. 28). A similar argument is made, within the constraints of this study's chosen methodology, by Reed & Runquist (2007) who suggest a need to reformulate grounded theory's substantive concept of a 'basic social process' to render it more congruent with the ontology and knowledge of particular groups.

An intended advantage of grounded theory is its flexibility, and Glaser & Strauss (1967) believed that qualitative and quantitative data were useful for both verification and generation of theory: "the process of generating theory is independent of the kind of data used" (p.18). Pidgeon (1996) acknowledges that some proponents of grounded theory, in particular Strauss and Corbin, promote its positivistic approach to qualitative inquiry, indicating that theory is discovered in the data, and the procedures could be perceived as guarantors of truth. Other grounded theorists, such as Charmaz (2006), advocate a more interpretative approach, and this is the position taken by this researcher to the researched phenomena. An interpretative approach places less importance on quantifying data, and more on qualifying data with a view to describe and explain relationships.

### **2.3 Reflexivity**

Finlay (2002) defines reflexivity as "thoughtful, conscious self-awareness. Reflexive analysis in research encompasses continual evaluation of subjective responses, intersubjective dynamics, and the research process itself" (p. 532). Finlay and Gough (2003) identify five variants of reflexivity, which include introspection, intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and ironic deconstruction. The researcher made efforts to incorporate reflexivity (spanning several of these variants) into the research process not only because she understood that her interpretations would be present and influential as she worked with the study data, but that her subjective and



intersubjective contributions were themselves data. Measures taken to monitor and critically reflect on her contribution to the data included keeping a research diary throughout the study, and, with help from a colleague, answering her own questions in an interview prior to the data collection beginning with participants. In addition, the researcher made notes before and after conducting the interviews in keeping with Glaser's (2002) recommendation that researchers "do field notes on themselves as just more data to constantly compare" (para.34). These techniques helped to raise the researcher's awareness about her assumptions and biases, and clarify her personal hypotheses about theory in relation to the trainee's experience.

Grounded theory has received some criticism for its lack of attention to reflexivity. McLeod (2001) comments "Glaser and Strauss had little to say about ... qualities of the researcher, or the relationship between the researcher and informants" (p.71). Timmermans & Tavory (2007) describe Glaser's rejection of reflexivity as 'paralyzing' and 'self-destructive', and potentially forcing the data as opposed to letting it emerge as was intended. Similarly, Hall & Callery (2001) urge that "reflexivity and relationality, ... defined as attending to the effects of researcher-participant interactions on the construction of data and to power and trust relationships between researchers and participants, should be incorporated into grounded theory" (p. 257) in order to attend to the rigor of grounded theory findings. Glaser himself wrote that he saw "researcher impact on data as one more variable to consider whenever it emerges as relevant", stating, "like all GT categories and properties; it must earn its relevance" (2002, para. 47).

Numerous other writers (Neill, 2006; Rennie, Phillips and Quartaro, 1988) acknowledge the importance of researcher reflexivity, however the researcher considers that the time, context and researcher epistemology are key in this argument,

and Mantzoukas (2004) and Merriam (1998) speak of this in their own ways. For Mantzoukas, “the representation of the researcher in qualitative inquiries is inevitable, and the exclusion, or not, of the researcher from the text is a mere conventional agreement founded on a paradigmatic consensus” (p.994). Mantzoukas concludes, there is “a correlation between issues of representation and the researcher’s stated epistemological and ontological assumptions” (p.994), which Merriam (1998) echoes, describing the assumptions instead as “...orientations to basic tenets about the nature of reality” (p.5) and recognising the likelihood of these determining a researcher’s choice of method and way of presenting the data. Scheurich (1997) shares his own personal epistemology, “how I see (my epistemology) must precede what I see (my ontology) because how I see shapes, frames, determines, and even creates what I see” (p.29). Scheurich’s perspective gives structure to his experience of reality, in the way that a theory can for experience, and methodology can for its data.

The researcher does not name her ontological position in this research because she considers that her epistemological position may, as Scheurich suggests, give form to ontology. Her epistemological position is that we construct our reality largely from socially shared meanings. Therefore she recognises her experience to be inseparable from a bigger social picture (e.g. her socio-economic status, ethnicity, training in the field of counselling psychology), and one that must occur within relationships (e.g. in the shaping of our frame of reference, from whom we learn theory, or the experience between the therapist and client or researcher and participant). This position sees her favour constructivist grounded theory and discount alternative methodological approaches for the research, as will now be described.

## **2.4 Alternative methodological approaches to the research**

Consideration of different methodologies for the present research is both a process of describing why the researcher discounted ways of making sense of the studied phenomena, and one of acknowledging the existence of alternative ways of addressing it. McLeod (2001) suggests that we construct the world, through talk, action, systems of meaning, memory, rituals and institutions, and also shape the world physically and materially; and considers that the qualitative methodologies “each take on a different facet of this task” (p.2). Some of these, heuristics, hermeneutics, discourse analysis and phenomenology are now given some thought.

#### **2.4.1 Heuristics**

Heuristic inquiry makes use of a process of disciplined self-reflection to explore and depict the essence of an area of human experience. It invites the researcher’s consciousness (perception, sense, knowledge or intuition) to be explored, and Moustakas (1990) explains that the heuristic process involves “not only lifting out the essential meanings of an experience, but ... actively awakening and transforming my own self. Self-understanding and self-growth occur simultaneously in heuristic discovery” (p.13). This approach is described as demanding and time-consuming for the researcher, who must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomena being studied and hold great interest in the question that they seek to shed light on. Heuristic inquiry is guided by the conception that knowledge grows out of direct human experience and can be discovered and explicated initially through self-inquiry. Douglass & Moustakas (1985) observe that “without the restraining leash of formal hypotheses, and free from external methodological structures that limit awareness or channel it” (p.44), direct experience is accessible.

Whilst heuristic inquiry is ‘autobiographic’ Moustakas (1990) suggests that with almost every question that has personal significance “there is also social – and perhaps universal – significance” (p.15). Adding to the autobiographical data, are detailed descriptions, direct quotations, case documentaries, together with anything that the researcher comes across that may add to the process.

Heuristic inquiry interested the researcher because she had had a direct, personal encounter with the studied phenomena, and was thoughtful about her own experience and what this meant to her personally and professionally. Given sufficient time, this methodology would have undoubtedly revealed something valuable about why such a research question was chosen and the essence of what made it important to explore for the researcher. However, the approach was not selected for several reasons. Firstly, the researcher’s interests had evolved from emotional responses themselves to the role of theory in how these experiences are made sense of, and, whilst a broad, two-part research question was an advantage in using grounded theory because the conceptual theory generated is data-led, the heuristic inquiry would be entirely research question-led.

A second reason for discounting heuristics was that the researcher was particularly interested in other peoples’ experiences of the phenomena, and while heuristics might be used in conjunction with other approaches (Charmaz, 2003; Etherington, 2004) for this, this is neither its strength nor purpose. Finally, creating a contextual story about the meaning of one’s experience of having emotional responses to clients would be achievable given heuristics’ lack of structural restraint; whereas this study makes constructive use of its methodology’s structural restraint, both to sort data and to demonstrate the way theory can be a restraining structure (helpfully or unhelpfully) in relation to experience.

### 2.4.2 Hermeneutics

The hermeneutic method is interpretive (Parse, 2001, p.51) and is about studying experience in the “close and careful study of free-flowing texts” (Bernard, 2000, p.19) with a view to discover meaning. Consideration is given to context, such as the historical and cultural meanings through which the world is experienced. Parse (2001) synthesised the assumptions of Heidegger (1927/1962), Gadamer (1976, 1960/1998) and Ricoeur’s (1974) approaches to hermeneutics, producing the following points: 1) Language is the horizon of hermeneutic ontology; 2) Fore-knowing and prejudices are constituents of meaning; 3) There is a dynamic interaction between language style and speech event; 4) The researcher-text dialectic arises with a fusion of horizons; and that 5) Situatedness is the context undergirding emergent understandings (p.52).

The researcher acknowledges that two of these hermeneutic thinkers Heidegger and Gadamer made an impression on her thinking regarding the concealment and unconcealment of reality, which she considered in relation to her studied phenomena. Gadamer (n.d.) wrote of “the tendency of language to reveal reality in a limited set of semantic and logical relationships, which simultaneously covers over other possible sets of relationships from which the same reality could be disclosed” (in Wachterhauser, 1999, p.10). The researcher considered that studying text (e.g. the interview transcripts) might lose something of the experience of ‘being with’ the participants, whereas this could be incorporated into the researcher’s social construction of the grounded theory. This said, hermeneutic methodology has been used in such a way to include the interpersonal encounter (see Greenwood & Loewenthal, 2005), and also, hermeneutics does recognise the interpretative frame of reference of the researcher (perhaps as the ‘fore-knowing’ of the researcher), as does it acknowledge the context of text.

Context is an important consideration because it ties experiences shared by trainee counselling psychologists to their social origins. For example, recent history within the field was highly relevant to what participants spoke about at interview (as discussed elsewhere). Similarly, there were frequent commonalities between participants in how they spoke, as well as their use of theoretical terminology. Given this, an interesting language-focussed contribution regarding the impact of theory might have been made with hermeneutic inquiry.

### 2.4.3 Discourse Analysis

With language still under the spotlight, but with important differences to hermeneutics, discourse analysis is the linguistic analysis of an on-going flow of communication. Foucault (1972) suggests we call “discourse a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation” (p.117), and described discourse as “constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they are statements, that is, in so far as they can be assigned particular modalities of existence” (p.107). Specifically, it may involve understanding “how speakers construct and negotiate meaning (discourse practices) as well as why they may draw on certain repertoires rather than others (discourse resources)” (Wetherell, 1998, p.183).

Smith (2008) distinguishes between two types of discourse analysis - discursive and Foucauldian, but for the purposes of this brief consideration it is enough to understand that both methods “share a concern with the role of language in the construction of social reality” (p.180). In keeping with this Gee (1999) identifies two primary functions of language, 1) to scaffold the performance of social activities and 2) to scaffold human affiliation within cultures, social groups and institutions (p.1). For the researcher to address this in practice, a recording of the discourse between

researcher and participant is played and replayed for the purposes of the analysis.

Patterns of interaction, and the way time is used, are considered part of the discourse.

The main reason for discounting this methodology is that it may not capture the emotional and experiential material that may be important to the making-sense processes for this study's participants. Frie (2003) expresses this in his emphasis that there are areas of experience that cannot be reached through language:

To reduce prelinguistic and nonverbal experience to that which can be verbally articulated is to neglect a crucial fact: the nonverbal realm exists precisely because there is a dimension of human experience that cannot be adequately represented in, or expressed through language. This does not imply that what cannot be linguistically articulated can be disregarded. On the contrary, the nonverbal affective dimension specifically resists being drawn into discourse (p.148).

#### **2.4.4 Phenomenology and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

Edmund Husserl (1913) founding father of phenomenology, suggested that phenomenologists were to 'go back to the things themselves', that is, our experiential content of consciousness (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) and focus on describing how an individual experiences the world or the studied phenomena. Like grounded theory, McLeod (2001) suggests that phenomenology places its attention, for the most part, is on the meanings through which people construct their realities (p.2). Important to this approach is the need for the researcher to immerse themselves in the material in order to look for the essence of what the phenomena means. However the researcher has to 'bracket' their views and assumptions during this immersion in the phenomena to make way for new meanings (McLeod, 2003). Whilst there are no rigid rules in

phenomenological inquiry, there are several approaches, and one of the most popular of these is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

One of IPA's distinctive features is its commitment to a detailed interpretative account of the cases included, and "many researchers are recognising that this can only realistically be done on a very small sample – thus in simple terms one is sacrificing breadth for depth" (Smith, 2008, p.56). Should a semi-structured interview be used for IPA, then this would take a similar form to the method used for the present study, with an interview schedule for guidance but with opportunity given to the participant to tell their story and speak of their experience, and this way, unlike a structured interview, participants are able to bring in their (often important) novel ideas that the researcher might not have thought about. An audio recording of the interview allows for proper analysis post-interview, although clearly non-verbal communication cannot be captured by this means. The aim in the analysis is to look for meaning, which might be in the form of beliefs or constructs, and try to understand the "content and complexity of those meanings rather than measure their frequency", in order to achieve this, the investigator must engage in an "interpretative relationship with the transcript" (Smith, 2008, p.66). Reading and re-reading takes place and the researcher begins to make a note of themes (e.g. summarising, paraphrasing, associations, early interpretations) before beginning to consider connections between the emerging themes.

IPA might have been a fitting choice of methodology for the present study particularly for capturing the essence and meaning of experience. Instead, grounded theory's structured approach informed by social constructionist and process-orientated roots was chosen to capture something of the relationship between this experience and theory. This meant some compromise of depth, but this best fit the epistemological angle of this investigation.



## 2.5 The chosen methodology: Grounded Theory Method (GTM)

### 2.5.1 A brief history

In Glaser and Strauss' (1967) seminal text, they put forward a case for how theory can be discovered, from data that is systematically obtained and analysed in social research, as an alternative to logico-deductive theorising. They challenged that the researcher's role should be one of just verifying theory, and instead proffered a way to generate theory. They advocated 1) integrating data collection and data analysis, 2) developing middle-range theories from research grounded in data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories, 3) treating qualitative research as rigorous and legitimate in its own right, and, 4) viewing qualitative inquiry as a means for constructing theory. All these ideas challenged conventional positivist notions of qualitative research as impressionistic, unsystematic, atheoretical, anecdotal and biased (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008, p. 243).

In the years that followed, and in particular after Strauss had published *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* with Corbin (1990), a divergence was seen between the co-founders. Glaser objected to Strauss & Corbin's move towards verification, and emphasis on new technical procedures instead of the comparative methods that distinguished earlier grounded theory strategies (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser saw these procedures as 'forcing' the data instead of allowing it to emerge (see discussion around the antagonism between 'emergence' and theoretical sensitivity by Kelle, 2007).

In Bryant & Charmaz's (2007) comprehensive overview of the theory and practice of grounded theory which takes into account 'the many attempts to revise and refine' its original formulation, they describe GTM as comprising a systematic, inductive and comparative approach for conducting inquiry for the purpose of constructing theory:

The method is designed to encourage researchers' persistent interaction with their data, while remaining constantly involved with their emerging analyses. Data

collection and analysis proceed simultaneously and each informs and streamlines the other. The GTM builds empirical checks into the analytic process and leads researchers to examine all possible theoretical explanations for their empirical findings. The iterative process of moving back and forth between empirical data and emerging analysis makes the collected data progressively more focused and the analysis successively more theoretical (p.1).

Different versions of GTM exist today, and Bryant & Charmaz (2007) indicate that most researchers agree that there are three main versions, namely the Glaserian school, the Strauss and Corbin school, and the Constructivist school of GTM. The authors suggest one might term GTM a ‘family of methods’ in a Wittgensteinian sense, that is, one can look for relationships and commonalities, but “you will not see something that is common to all” (Wittgenstein, 1953/2001, p.27). Despite this, attempts are made by authors to pull together GTM criteria that they consider to be central. Hood (2007) notes that three features distinguish GTM from any other research methods: (1) theoretical sampling, (2) constant comparison of data to theoretical categories, and (3) focus on the development of theory via theoretical saturation of categories rather than substantive verifiable findings. The use of these features will be described for the present study.

### 2.5.2 Constructing grounded theory

Unlike the position taken by Glaser and Strauss, Charmaz (2006) assumes that “neither data nor theories are discovered... we are all part of the world we study and the data we collect” she suggests that “we *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (p.10). Glaser and Strauss (1967) invited researchers to use grounded theory flexibly in their own way, and Charmaz did this by developing her own set of principles and practices, which take account of theoretical and methodological developments over

recent decades. However, in ‘Constructivist Grounded Theory?’ Glaser (2002) highlighted what he saw as Charmaz’s mistakes and misunderstandings in considering her constructivist approach grounded theory. He argued that pure grounded theory was objective because the constant comparison produced concepts, whereas she was attempting to remodel grounded theory.

Bryant (2007) defended Charmaz suggesting that she distinguished between objectivist and constructivist concepts, where “[t]he former assumes the reality of an external world, takes for granted a neutral observer, and views categories as derived from data. The latter recognizes that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed” (Charmaz, 2000, p.523). Charmaz (2006) acknowledges that many of the disputes and critiques from both grounded theorists themselves and other colleagues result from “where various authors stand between interpretive and positivist traditions” (p.129). This awareness has inspired writers to study grounded theory’s philosophical evolution, including Annells (1996) who concluded that while grounded theory has traditionally been located in a postpositivist inquiry paradigm, it is shifting and moving toward the constructivist inquiry paradigm.

### **2.5.3 Grounded theory research in practice**

Rennie, Phillips and Quartaro (1988) were the first clinical/practitioner psychologists to employ grounded theory principles and practices. Their two key areas of methodological concern included seeking out and utilizing holistic methods for understanding and representing the full complexity of clients’ and research participants’ lived experiences and actions, *in situ*; and, fostering forms of theorising within psychology that satisfy the demands of those seeking to combine their clinical/practical elements and academic

research (p.139). Qualitative methods, in particular grounded theory, were deemed to be important in both regards (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008, p.246).

Rennie, Phillips, Quartaro (1988) employed grounded theory for their psychotherapy research because “it seemed relatively more systematic than any of the other approaches and because, compared to the phenomenological and new paradigm approaches, it place[d] less emphasis on the role of the researcher in co-constructing the respondent’s accounts”. They viewed this as “two-edged” because the “analysis would be less intense, but as compensation, would be a way of studying a relatively large number of individuals” (p.140). The advantage of achieving some generalizability from this qualitative approach marks a point of divergence with the present study, however, if it “gives the researcher a number of ways of rebutting the challenges of those hostile to qualitative research” given that many qualitative methods “appear to lack some rigour and generalizability” (McLeod, 2001, p.1), then naturally this can be advantageous to some researchers.

There are numerous attractions to grounded theory methodology, widely known are that it has a set of systematic guidelines, which from the researcher’s perspective can feel like a holding framework for the novice researcher. The approach has an “ever-expanding body of published articles that can function as exemplars and models” (McLeod, 2001, p.70) and can be applied in different circumstances quite flexibly. Some limitations of grounded theory are that it is “primarily a method for analysing data, rather than a technique for data collection” (p.71) and this can be seen in the confusion that exists around what is and what is not theoretical sampling. Its appropriateness for use depends on the research question, and the way that it is used depends on how it is understood by the researcher. McLeod (2001) adds to this point in describing the key

skill of the good grounded theory researcher, which is to “be sensitive to the potential multiple meanings of the data” (p.71).

#### **2.5.4 Reasons for selecting grounded theory methodology for the present study**

Grounded theory was chosen for the present research because it offers a structured and yet flexible qualitative method, which inductively uses what emerges to construct a theory grounded in the data. It is of particular value because it shares a struggle with the researcher and study participants concerning the relationship between theory and experience. While its use might appear to produce ‘a theory constructed about theory’, theories produced using this approach can be so diverse as to range from “an empirical generalisation” to “a predisposition”, “an explication of process” to “a relationship between variables”, or “an abstract understanding” to “a description” (Charmaz, 2006, p.113). Therefore, this approach generates an interpretative and flexible (grounded) theory, which may or may not differ to those theories discussed by participants in relation to their experience. The value of this is that constructing a theory (of any sort) makes way for even more to be learnt about the nature of theory and one’s relationship with it (see p.146 for further discussion on this).

During this study, consideration was given to the possibility that theory could give rise to concealment as well as unconcealment (Heidegger, 1943/1998; Gadamer, n.d.) of information to the researcher and practitioner, and the researcher was interested to observe that a similar and fitting idea existed in grounded theorists’ recommendations for the researcher not to explore the literature prior to commencing the study and collecting and analysing the data, “for fear that over commitment to existing theories and concepts may prevent them from making new discoveries” (McLeod, 2003, p.88).

In investigating the impact of theory on the way trainees made sense of their emotional response experiences, this methodology allowed the researcher to construct a

theory grounded in data that was systematically obtained, while also inclusive of much more than participants' verbal responses. This study observes the constructivist (interpretive) as opposed to objectivist (positivist) grounded theory method, emphasising the phenomena of study and seeing "both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants" (Charmaz, 2006, p.130). This conceptual approach recognises processes that produce the data, and context, which is in keeping with the counselling psychology ethos. Grounded theory has been used for related research including Baehr's (2005) study on psychotherapist's management and use of countertransference, and Bitar, Bean & Bermudez's (2007) study on theoretical orientation development.

In researching experiences of such an unpredictable, transitory and potentially personal nature as emotional responses, in relation to ideas that are subject to personal interpretation such as theory, findings grounded in the data were considered helpful for capturing something of the personal and social meaning of the phenomena accessible through words, actions and processes. Finally, constructivist grounded theory equipped the researcher with enough guidance and enough freedom to be able to weave together rich experience in order to explicate a relational process, relevant to the time, place and people that contributed to its construction.

## **2.6 Validity issues**

Validity issues can arise with qualitative methods such as grounded theory (McLeod, 2001), and measures can be taken to allay this. Verifying a sample of coding with a senior researcher or colleague familiar with the method would be one such measure, however, given the constructionist foundations of the approach taken, this was deemed unnecessary and unhelpful by the researcher for the present study because having another

researcher try to verify a transcript would simply produce a new construction of the data based on the interpretations of the new person interacting with the data.

The researcher's position regarding validity is supported by Janesick (2000) who argues against the "constant obsession with the trinity of validity, reliability and generalizability" for qualitative research, explaining the consequent problem to be that "experience is separated from knowing...[and this]...is another way to move away from the actual experience of participants in the research project" (p.390). Richardson (2000) also rejects this methodological triangulation, offering 'crystallization' as a multidimensional way to approach qualitative research that "deconstructs the traditional idea of 'validity'..."(p.934).

Etherington (2004) suggests that reflexivity itself "adds validity and rigour... by providing information about the contexts in which data are located" (p.37), therefore the researcher considers that with appropriate attention to reflexivity in this study, validity measures, whilst worthy of consideration, are contradictory to the approach taken. Validity and reflexivity are considered further in the discussion chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Method

#### 3.1 Study Design

With the researcher's methodological position now evident, this chapter attends to the practical, procedural and analytical aspects of conducting the study. Details of the flexible study design considered appropriate for this research will be outlined, including the research question and aims, information about the research interview, the sampling and recruitment of participants, the ethical management of data once gathered, and the simultaneous collection and analysis of data.

The constructivist grounded theory methodology was operationalized with semi-structured interviews to explore the way that participants made sense of their experiences of having emotional responses towards their clients. The impact of theory in this process was the researcher's particular interest, and it was interactions with academic and non-academic colleagues, literature, and the researcher's knowledge, understanding, and personal experiences, that helped to refine this study focus. The research question, 'how do trainee counselling psychologists make sense of their emotional responses to clients, and what impact, if any, do theories have on the way they make sense of this experience' was developed and used to guide the data collection and analysis. The research aims (included below) also steered the research process, each aim connecting with one of the three key inter-relating areas (the emotional response experience, theory, and the making sense process) described in the introduction chapter.



Aims:

- i) To add to what is known about becoming a counselling psychologist, with a focus on trainee's experience of having and making sense of emotional responses to clients in practice.
- ii) To explore what impact, if any, theories, such as countertransference, have on the way trainees make sense of this experience.
- iii) To contribute to our understanding of the nature of counselling psychology knowledge, based on the way theory and experience, as described, inter-relate in practice.

The organisation of the three key areas into the research aims listed above helped the researcher with the construction of the interview questions for the research participants. Participant and interview details are now addressed respectively.

### **3.2 Sampling & recruitment of participants**

The sample for this study consisted of twelve final year trainee counselling psychologists, initially from doctoral training programmes, but adjusted to include others from British Psychological Society (BPS) accredited training programmes (see 3.5.3 Theoretical Sampling). Participants responded to an advertisement circulated through university and training institution channels, and the BPS division of counselling psychology communications. A few participants expressed interest after their peers had come across the research. To circulate the advertisement through training institution channels the researcher sought institutional consent from course directors, prior to recruitment of their trainees (see training institution consent form, Appendix F). Participants came from three

different BPS accredited counselling psychology training programmes, located at training institutions in London, UK. These included City University, the Metanoia Institute, and Roehampton University. Other London training institutions that were contacted, but did not lead to the recruitment of participants, include London Metropolitan University, University of East London and the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling. The researcher did not recruit participants from her own training cohort in order to reduce bias. Although the researcher recognises herself as irremovable from the research, she anticipated that her relationship with her training colleagues could influence their responses, and sharing their programme of study would enable the researcher to too easily apply her views in the interview or later to the data.

The advertisement used to recruit the study participants comprised a poster (Appendix D), and a briefing information form (Appendix E), which outlined the purpose of the research and the proposed contribution of the participant. Once firm interest had been expressed in participating, a consent form (Appendix G) was emailed for information, to be completed with the researcher prior to the start of the interview. As stated on the participant consent form, the researcher reminded participants of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research without giving a reason, using their participant ID code allocated at interview to provide anonymity and maintain confidentiality. It was explained that data in an aggregate form might be used in the write-up of the research and might be published. All participants that the researcher corresponded with wished to proceed, and the researcher arranged a convenient date, time and venue for the interview to take place.

### **3.3 Semi-structured interviews**

#### **3.3.1 Shape and format of interviews**

Interviews were frequently held in rooms booked on training institution premises, and occasionally at other suitable locations for participants e.g. a quiet room at a workplace.

Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour in duration, allowing several minutes for briefing and giving consent, 45 minutes to conduct the interview itself, and several minutes to debrief at the end (see debriefing form, Appendix H). Each interview was digitally audio recorded, allowing transcription and analysis of the data post-interview.

The researcher prepared for the interviews but conducted them flexibly, inspired by Charmaz's (2006) description of grounded theory interviewing as "open-ended but directed, shaped yet emergent and paced yet flexible" (p.28). This illustrates the ethos of this approach to the method, where the interview is seen as part of the research process. Having spent time speaking and reflecting on their experiences in practice during the interview, participants often gained a more developed or renewed understanding of their experiences. This was not due to any intentional actions made by the researcher, but her presence and questions might have contributed to this, as the researcher recognises the exchange between participant and researcher to be co-constructed.

Following the interview, the researcher allowed additional time (approximately 15 minutes) to discuss concerns that might have arisen from the interview, where necessary. No participants expressed any concerns arising from their interview, but most were engaged with the topic and the researcher for a few minutes after the interview, and welcomed an exchange of training experiences.

### **3.3.2 Interview questions**

Prior to recruitment of the research participants, time was spent developing the interview schedule comprising a small number of appropriate questions to ask at each interview.

Questions were designed to have participants begin by describing their experience of an emotional response to a client, then explore the way they made sense of the experience, and where theory(s) were part of that process, consider the theory's impact on the way they made sense of the experience. As stated, careful attention was given to the language used to reduce theoretically orientated bias.

The structured interview questions are listed in Appendix A and summarised as follows:

- **I would like to invite you to share your experience of an emotional response that you have had towards a client in your practice.**

*This would be followed by timely and appropriate prompts, such as:*

- **What has helped, or has not helped, you to make sense of this experience?**

*If theory/theories are mentioned:*

- **What impact would you say this theory/these theories have on your experience?**

The prompts and use of additional questions also evolved as theoretical categories developed from the data, for example, participants were asked 'how does learning several theories impact the way you make sense of your experience' in response to theoretical modalities being compared and contrasted. This flexibility within the participant interviews was a helpful aspect of the chosen methodology that contributed the progressing data analysis.

### **3.4 Simultaneous data collection and analysis**

Once preparations had been made for receiving, managing, and storing participant data (digital audio recordings and interview transcripts) the interviews could take place as described. The process of simultaneous data collection and analysis could begin once

the first interview was being analysed. Grounded theory methodology adopts a theoretical sampling strategy (see 3.5.3), whereby future data collection can be informed by earlier data analysis, and this enables researchers to “shape ... data collection to inform our emerging analysis” (Charmaz, 2006, p.20).

### **3.5 Data analysis**

As the data collection begun, the research question ‘what is the impact of theory on the way trainee counselling psychologists make sense of their emotional response experiences to clients’ became a beacon for the researcher in a sea of possibilities concerning how to organise and analyse the data. As Willig (2008) explains, “[g]rounded theory is both the process of category identification and integration (as method) and its product (as theory)” (p. 35). The ‘method’ is demonstrated within this section of the chapter, and the ‘theory’ will be discussed in chapter four.

The following stages of data analysis reveal the process through which the final theoretical construction was reached. These analytic stages will be described and demonstrated, and include the following: the consideration and assignment of initial codes to lines and sections of participant’s interview transcripts, the formation of focussed codes accounting for numerous initial codes, consideration of theoretical codes, and, the use of memos written throughout the research process to sort the codes and construct developing categories in ways that form analytic concepts. Attention is also given to what Hood (2007) terms the ‘troublesome trinity’, three features of grounded theory regarded both as “essential” and “the most difficult for researchers to understand and apply” (p.13). These features include theoretical sampling, constant comparison of data to theoretical categories, and focus on the development of theory via theoretical saturation of categories rather than substantive verifiable findings.

### 3.5.1 Coding the data

The first stage of analysis was to assign codes to the data. Charmaz (2006) describes coding or the “bones of the analysis” (p.45) as the stage that functions to select, separate and sort data, allocating names to summarise the piece of data and begin to categorize it. Codes are therefore a ‘pivotal link’ between the data and developing the theory that explains the data. Different stages and types of coding exist, including initial coding, focussed coding and theoretical coding. The latter are more sophisticated and are about piecing back together the (earlier coded) fractured data. Descriptions of these three types of coding, including the researcher’s reasoning for not making deliberate use of theoretical coding, are given shortly, and examples of initial and focussed coding are presented in Appendix B, and also in Appendix C.

Initial coding is the first stage of coding in grounded theory analysis. This stage requires the grounded theorist to note the ‘actions and processes’ seen in the data, and this reduces our “tendencies to make conceptual leaps and to adopt extant theories *before* we have done the necessary analytic work” (Charmaz, 2006, p.48). Glaser (1978) suggests we ask ‘what is happening here?’ of our data, and Charmaz (2006) recommends staying close and remaining open to the data, keeping codes short, simple and precise, while moving quickly through the data. Examples of initial coding can be found in Appendix B, in Extracts 1 and 2. These extracts demonstrate the codes used to capture what was happening in these sections of two quite different interviews.

Focussed coding involves codes that are more directive, selective, and conceptual (Glaser, 1978), and their purpose is to synthesize and describe or explain larger amounts of data from the initial codes. It is also a process of deciding “which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorise your data incisively and completely” (Charmaz, 2006, p.57).

In Appendix B, Extracts 3 and 4 show the sections of interview transcripts from Extracts 1 and 2, respectively, but this time with focussed coding.

Theoretical coding can follow the initial and focussed coding, and theoretical codes are understood to specify possible relationships between categories that have been developed during the focussed coding. Glaser argued that they preclude the need for Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 1998) axial coding, because they "not only conceptualize how your substantive codes are related, but also move your analytic story in a theoretical direction" (Charmaz, 2006, p.63). Although there are Glaser's (1978) series of 18 theoretical coding families, the researcher did not (knowingly) utilize any pre-existing theoretical codes. Despite this, the researcher's analysis had some similarities to aspects of existing coding families, e.g. 'temporal ordering' and the 'Six C's' (causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances and conditions). The researcher's decision to avoid pre-existing theoretical codes is summarised well by Charmaz (2006) "[w]hen we look at how analytic styles and conceptual toolkits take hold in a discipline, we discover fads and trends...[that] ...limit ways of seeing as well as perhaps forcing data into old boxes" (p.64). Instead, the researcher found that using memos worked adequately for locating relationships between categories.

### 3.5.2 Memoing and the formation of categories

During the coding, memos are written to help with the generation, development and defining of categories. These analytic notes and ideas are considered the intermediate stage between coding data and writing a draft paper, and help to map the interrelationships between categories, and their properties. Kelle (2007) describes the 'backbone' of grounded theory category building in two rules: i) categories should not be forced on the data, they should emerge in the ongoing process of data analysis; ii) when

developing categories the researcher should employ theoretical sensitivity, described as “the ability to see relevant data and to reflect upon empirical data material with the help of theoretical terms” (p.193). These rules were achievable with use of memos written throughout the data analysis.

Three examples of memos now follow, and each makes reference to important themes.

Memo 1 also describes something of the difference in content between the two interview extracts included in Appendix B.

**Memo 1:** While the interview questions are designed to move participant’s focus from their emotional response experiences, to making sense of them with regards to theory, there seems to be an observable difficulty moving from speaking about one to the other. It is as though they are very different to think about and the two area’s codes often seem to be sitting in two distinct camps, emotional response experience-related, or theory-related.

**Memo 2:** Connecting the experience and theory, is i) the making sense process, and ii) the relationship. Theory is very often used to explain or understand the experience, often to the extent that it becomes part of the description of the experience itself. Further, sometimes assumptions are made about theory, such that it is factual or truth – this may be done unknowingly. The relationship with the client was often suggested to be more important than theory in practice. However, there are theories about the relationship, and it is unknown whether trainees are always aware of when they are using these. Towards the end of interviews participants seem more able to speak about how they make sense of the relationship between their experience and theory.

**Memo 3:** Context is often given as part of the experience, therefore, reference to important relationships (professional or personal) that helped them (or did



not help) make sense of their emotional responses, or guided them regarding use of theory, are frequent; as are comparisons between experiences earlier in the training, compared to where trainees are now.

Memos, such as the three above, helped the researcher to develop the initial and focussed codes into initial categories; examples of this are shown in Table 1 (using codes from Appendix B for continuity). The continued comparing of data with categories eventually reconstructed the early categories into the final categories, and 3.5.4 gives an indication of this stage of development.

**Table 1: Memos in the formation of initial categories**

<b>Memo</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Initial categories</b>
<b>1</b>	<p>Describing incompatibility with feelings (supervisor's theoretical approach).  Confusion about what is feeling.  Uncertainty raised by the experience.  Trying to find a way to answer the question.</p> <p>Theoretical model a condition/class of when emotional responses (ER) relevant.  Unsure about identifying a specific experience.  Comparing/contrasting own feelings and thoughts.  Expressing more general thoughts.</p>	<p>Difference</p> <p>Difficulty</p>
<b>2</b>	<p>Trying to make sense of the experience.  Questioning self and experience.  Uncertainty about purpose of ER.</p> <p>Identifying types of ER.  A relevant experience.  Becoming aware of how to manage ERs.</p> <p>Learning about theory.  Considering theory of interest.  The role of theoretical models.  Considering theory's limitations.</p> <p>Affirming an important connection.  Realising meaning of theory in practice.  Understanding theory from experience in practice.  Using practice to bring theory to life.  Experience in clinical practice can be necessary to understand theory.  Theory meaningless without experience in practice.  Theory can be meaningless prior to clinical practice.</p>	<p>Trying to understand the experience</p> <p>Management of the experience</p> <p>Theoretical rules</p> <p>Theory-experience relationship</p>
<b>3</b>	Frequent experience for her in practice.	Conditions

	<p>Considering the more memorable types of ER. Acknowledging relevance of subject to her. Conditions/context of ER experience.</p> <p>Impact of the experience. Describing difficulty/demands of client sessions. Negative types of ER described as uncomfortable. Types of ER that produce more discomfort.</p> <p>Supervision a place where ERs considered. Needing support for the experience. Believed unsupported with ERs. Stating dissatisfaction with supervision support. Uncertainty about where ER originates from.</p> <p>Development over time. ER that changes with time. Locating ER with a time during training. Recognising own confusion. Attaching theoretical model to supervisor. Learning from experience. Locating a time of increased learning. Accumulating clinical practice. Seeing in people what has been theorised. Temporal aspects of learning relationship between theory and experience.</p> <p>Expecting something different from training. Clinical practice needed for sense making.</p>	<p>surrounding the experience</p> <p>Impact of the experience</p> <p>Support</p> <p>Trainee's development and learning</p> <p>Training requirements</p>
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### 3.5.3 Theoretical sampling

In support of category development, grounded theory adopts a theoretical sampling strategy allowing sampling to be guided by what emerges from the data. Its purpose is to “elaborate and refine the categories constituting your theory” (Charmaz, 2006, p.96).

Very early on, the researcher found that it was impossible to know the difference between data that would later become important, and data suggesting participants were less suitable, based on their struggle with the research question. Because of this, the sample was broadened in response to early interview findings such as, i) some trainees struggled to think of or speak about a specific experience of having an emotional response to a client in practice, and, ii) a conflict existed for trainees between some theoretical orientations and the “relevance” and “validity” (participant’s terms) of emotional responses in practice.

Broadening the sample (with the possibility of developing these findings) was achieved by including participants who were:

- 1) From different counselling psychology professional training programmes to early participants – to explore the extent to which these questions could be considered by those on programmes with different theoretical leanings;
- 2) From current non-doctoral (as well as doctoral) counselling psychology professional training programmes – to explore whether duration of training programme (e.g. those that trained over a period longer than the three year doctorate) or level of competence had a bearing on these early findings.

Decisions about suitable participants for the study were influenced by early indications that the trainee’s development and learning over time might be an important factor (as per Table 1). To study this, the initial plans to recruit only final year trainees for interview who had learnt all of the theory that they were to learn on their programme of training, remained appropriate. However the initial decision to exclude final year trainees not on doctoral programmes, for consistency across level of training, was disregarded because these trainees were equally able to consider questions concerning theory and practice, and their additional time in training was considered a way to develop an early

category relating to development over time. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that the introduction of a doctoral level qualification for counselling psychology was still in its infancy when this research was being conducted (Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2009), therefore the current differences between Masters and Doctoral level trainees were minimal, compared to their commonalities.

Further into the data collection and analysis, the researcher also sought participants from training programmes with different theoretical structures in order to develop properties of emerging categories (e.g. revealing and concealing experience). This sampling was different to a programme's theoretical 'leaning', and involved recruiting participants from programmes that taught theory integratively as well as those taught one-model-at-a-time.

#### **3.5.4 Constant comparison of data to theoretical categories**

Charmaz (2006) describes the constant comparative method of analysis as “inductive processes of comparing data with data, data with category, category with category and category with concept” (p.187). Initial concepts are compared and contrasted, similar concepts are clustered together, both within and between participants, and the resulting category is labelled (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this way, the comparisons made generate the increasingly abstract theoretical concepts by systematic means using the empirical data.

Table 2 takes the initial categories from Table 1, and shows the final grounded theory categories/concepts that they became reconstructed into, in light of more data and more comparisons with other categories.

**Table 2: Initial categories in the formation of final categories**

<b>Initial Category</b>	<b>Final Category</b>
Difference	The trainee's inability to perceive the impact of theory
Difficulty	Theory raises uncertainty in the trainee
Management of the experience	Theory reveals the trainee's experience (e.g. Theory informs the trainee what to do with their experience); Theory conceals the trainee's experience (e.g. The trainee's use of theory replaces their experience).
Trying to understand the experience	The trainee's relationship with theory; theory reveals the trainee's experience; Theory conceals the trainee's experience; The trainee's personal and professional development; The nature of the trainee's relationships.
Theoretical rules	The trainee's relationship with theory; Theory reveals the trainee's experience; Theory conceals the trainee's experience; Theory raises uncertainty in the trainee; The trainee's inability to perceive the impact of theory.
Theory-experience relationship	The trainee's relationship with theory; Theory reveals the trainee's experience; Theory conceals the trainee's experience; Theory raises uncertainty in the trainee; The trainee's inability to perceive the impact of theory.
Conditions surrounding the experience	The nature of the trainee's relationships (e.g. The trainee's relationship with their client); The trainee's personal and professional development.
Impact of the experience	Relieving the impact of the trainee's experience
Support	The nature of the trainee's relationships (e.g. The trainee's relationship with their role models).
Trainee's development and learning	The trainee's personal and professional development
Training requirements	The trainee's personal and professional development

With twelve participant interviews, the researcher had a great deal of data to work with; however, it was not necessary to identify all instances of each concept, but rather to

develop an understanding of their similarities and differences (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings

#### 4.1 Findings

The researcher found that the impact of theory on the way the trainee counselling psychologists made sense of their experiences of having emotional responses to clients, was best understood in terms of *the trainee's relationship with theory*. A total of eight categories were found, and the trainee's relationship with theory was considered to be the overarching category. The impact of theory was described by four of the categories found, and of the three remaining categories, one referred to the way theory was used, and two referred to factors that strongly influenced the relationship that a trainee had with theory.

It made sense to the researcher to categorise and structure the categories that had been found, and this, the researcher's construction of the findings, is outlined in the discussion chapter.

Table 3 lists examples of statements from the interview data that helped to construct the themes that became category properties, and finally, categories.

Following this, each category is described in more depth and quotes extracted from the interview transcripts help to illustrate the meaning of the categories and the way that they remained close to the data.



**Table 3: Grounded theory categories**

Statements from interview data	Properties of category	Name given to category
<p>“I don’t think there’s necessarily one (<i>theory</i>) that does tick all of the boxes all the time”</p> <p>“I feel that with the person-centred training, that in a sense is, to a degree, about letting go of theory and that feels like a more appropriate path”</p>	The trainee’s philosophical perspectives and theoretical knowledge	The trainee’s relationship with theory
<p>“At the very beginning I was very sort of suspicious of it all... when lecturers would say it’s all about the relationship I used to think yeah, whatever, obviously that’s what they think. So it took a while to almost then feel, ah, that’s what they’re talking about”.</p> <p>“It becomes easier with experience to know what is going on in the moment”</p>	The trainee’s self-awareness and personal development	
<p>“I think the tutors are using the theory in themselves...so I guess there’s a directive in there”</p> <p>“It was really critical actually that she (<i>supervisor</i>) had been trained in all three (<i>models</i>) and knew the benefits of the different models”</p>	Social aspects and influences affecting the trainee	

<p>“Theory helped me understand and make sense of a lot of my emotional experiences”</p> <p>“It was a kind of CBT but I was also bringing in some of Kohut’s stuff about empathy, so that there were psychodynamic influences, the transference and countertransference became critical, so it became an amalgam of different things; and actually where I am now is of the belief that each client needs a different model, a different way of working that’s appropriate to them”</p>	<p>The trainee uses theory to make meaning from their experience</p>	<p>Theory reveals the trainee’s experience</p>
<p>“I don’t think it (<i>countertransference</i>) changes the emotion, the emotion is the same and it stays there but it does affect whether I act or not, I suppose I make an informed decision as to whether I have to act on it”</p> <p>“With CBT it does feel like there are a lot of rules, and those rules are about moving through towards achieving goals”</p>	<p>Theory informs the trainee what to do with their experience</p>	
<p>(<i>Before learning psychodynamic theory</i>)</p> <p>“I hadn’t had the words to understand projection and splitting off, those terms are all really useful ... I use them and I like them”</p> <p>“...A form of enactment, I suppose enactment would be a range of theories which includes transference and</p>	<p>Theory provides the trainee with a name for their experience</p>	<p>Theory reveals the trainee’s experience</p>

countertransference, in a more umbrella term, so that's my main theoretical labelling that I'm looking at this particular client from"	Theory provides the trainee with a name for their experience (continued)	(continued)
<p>"It's almost like a brainwash into that particular modality"</p> <p>"It's easier to blame more negative feelings on the client and say well that's their stuff"</p>	The trainee's use of theory replaces their experience	Theory conceals the trainee's experience
<p>"I think that is really the only model that does explain it"</p> <p>"I don't know if I could think any differently... I don't think it's limiting"</p>	The trainee disregards alternative meanings for their experience	
<p>"Regardless of what label you put on it (<i>experience</i>) it really surmounts to pretty much the same thing"</p> <p>"I think it (<i>theory</i>) is their way of trying to explain something that is not entirely explainable, and I think there's necessary limitations in that"</p>	Criticisms the trainee makes about theory	
<p>"Some things we learn are not compatible"</p> <p>"The difficulty is that sometimes my therapist and the tutors are doing or saying different things"</p> <p>"I think the theory is just words until it is lived out"</p>	<p>The trainee's experience of conflicting theories or proponents of theory</p> <p>The trainee's position that theory is meaningless until it</p>	<p>Theory raises uncertainty in the trainee</p> <p>Theory raises</p>

<p>“Initially we are limited in our theoretical knowledge ... there is something about the repeated experience which confirms the theory”</p>	<p>is experienced in practice</p>	<p>uncertainty in the trainee (continued)</p>
<p>“I get caught up in the counter-transference I have been sucked in to the process and now it’s trying to untangle it”</p> <p>“I realised how much your own stuff can kind of interweave with your clients and it can get kind of hazy, like what’s mine and what’s hers and why’s this so difficult for me”</p>	<p>The trainee’s concern with issues of ownership or entanglement of emotional material in practice</p>	
<p>“It probably says more about me, because I’m not sure that it (<i>theory</i>) impacts”</p> <p>“I would have to sort of almost detach myself from it, later on think about it”</p>	<p>The trainee finds theory inseparable from their making-sense process</p>	<p>The trainee’s inability to perceive the impact of theory</p>
<p>“I think I just have to keep reminding myself ... all the things that we know kind of about theory ... rather than going with your gut feeling”</p> <p>“I’m not astute enough to say, ‘ooh I made that intervention because I was thinking about that particular model at the time’ it’s more intuitive than that...”</p>	<p>The trainee’s difficulty thinking about theory and their experience at the same time</p>	
<p>“I think I kind of unconsciously integrate a lot of things I read; in kind of, they just become mine and I don’t</p>	<p>The trainee has limited awareness about when they</p>	<p>The trainee’s inability to perceive the impact of theory (continued)</p>

<p>really know where they've come from"</p> <p>"There was an awareness (<i>about using theory</i>), but a lot of it was unconscious"</p>	<p>are using theory</p>	
<p>"I was thinking about psychodynamic supervision last year ... at the time I sort of didn't really have the language ... I have it much more now, I almost find it more useful now"</p> <p>"I'd be able to, much quicker, understand what's happening now, than I could have at the beginning" (<i>of training</i>)</p>	<p>It takes time for the trainee to incorporate theory into their practice</p>	<p>The trainee's personal and professional development</p>
<p>"That's the first time I'd come across a really major rupture, and I learnt from that process that actually the process of repair is so beneficial and so, in me what I learnt from that was a kind of trust in the process"</p> <p>"In that moment I was very conscious of allowing that to happen, making a choice really and knowing that she would see this"</p>	<p>The trainee learns to trust their own experience</p>	
<p>"Counselling psychology generally, makes you think in a more postmodern way, so I think people doing this course are generally more questioning and less ready to accept black and white facts as if they are facts"</p> <p>"You've built up these understandings now and now we're going to knock</p>	<p>The trainee's grasp of the counselling psychology ethos</p> <p>The trainee's grasp of counselling psychology ethos (continued)</p>	
		<p>Personal and professional development of the trainee (continued)</p>

them all down ... there's something quite humbling about having them knocked down"		
<p>"I'm thinking, what would my therapist do now"</p> <p>"It's not really the problem with the theory it's more to do with the supervisor because she's a bit inflexible"</p>	The trainee's relationship with their role models	The nature of the trainee's relationships
<p><i>(Learning new theories)</i> "I do feel myself changing quite rapidly at the minute, but I remind myself I need to remain consistent. With my clients I can't be going in and being all different every week"</p> <p>"I think that (relationship with client) is primary to knowing what's going on ... that's the launching pad... then you reflect on other aspects and sort of pick up what can inform the relationship"</p>	The trainee's relationship with their client	
<p>"I think in some ways I couldn't be the person that maybe she needed to hate as much as she needed me to be, because I think I was probably still too stuck in wanting to repair or make up"</p> <p>"I think a lot of counsellors probably take that role of the rescuer because I think that's the kind of role they may have taken in their family"</p>	<p>The trainee's relationship with their family of origin</p> <p>The trainee's relationship with their family of origin (continued)</p>	
		The nature of the trainee's relationships (continued)

<p>“Without CT theory I would have thought I was going mad, because that theory was helpful in making sense of all the nuances of it”</p> <p>“I felt really uncomfortable like he (<i>client</i>) had really over-stepped the mark, and I suppose really in my head and in my feelings worrying about what was going on... so how I coped with it I don't really know ... I tried to stay with it because that's what I knew I was supposed to be doing not going away from it”</p>	<p>The trainee uses theory to relieve the impact that their experience has upon them</p>	<p>Relieving the impact of the trainee's experience</p>
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## 4.2 Categories

The eight categories are described in turn. Within these descriptions, quotes made by participants at interview appear in a *different style font* for clarity.

### 4.2.1 *The trainee's relationship with theory*

Although initially placed with *the nature of the trainee's relationships* category, this category earned its place as the overarching or core category (see discussion) after the literature had been reviewed in relation to the findings. It became increasingly clear that this category represented something that had not yet been named by the researcher, and it also tied together important themes from reoccurring data. The researcher considers *the trainee's relationship with theory* to be their personal network of experiences, understandings and relationships relating to theory, and, a construct that reaches beyond the research question investigated. It can be further understood by describing its properties.

***The trainee's philosophical perspectives and theoretical knowledge*** refers to the totality of what the trainee knows about any one theory, parts of theories, integrative theories, and their own theories. It is their understanding of the theories through their frame of reference. Participants took a variety of positions on the value of learning several different theories to use in practice. Perspectives included trainees' acknowledgement of this as a challenge: "*Jumping around from theory to theory is really difficult and I find it very hard to hold more than one way of doing something*". Also, trainees recognised the advantages of being equipped with more theories: "*It allows you to be more impartial and perhaps consider different viewpoints and see ... which theory actually does explain it the best*". This property also refers to the range of philosophical perspectives known to trainees, particularly those that are dominant in their beliefs and practice. However, all of this knowledge is subject to context and so can be expected to change somewhat in accordance with situation, setting and client.

***Social aspects and influences affecting the trainee*** refer to the relationships with others that have a bearing on theoretical likes, dislikes and choices, including those listed under *the nature of the trainee's relationships*. For example, one trainee referred to her preferred role model and gave justification in saying "*supervisors that practice more integratively are less blinkered because I think the theory also can be quite stifling*". This also includes the idea of personifying theories, for example, participants spoke of the theory giving them permission to take certain actions, or forbidding other behaviours or interventions.

***The trainee's self awareness and personal development*** then pulls these other features together; for, over time, trainees were understood to vary in how aware they were, and how they approached, their interactions with theory. One participant, for



instance, acknowledged that psychodynamic theories increased her awareness and focus on emotional responses, but that this was a challenge because, in her words, “*I didn’t want to accept my part in the process*”. This property also describes the possible impacts of using particular theories on their interpretations of experiences. In addition, timing is important, because the incorporation or embodiment of theory (adding new information to one’s relationship with theory) is a layered not a linear process, involving experiential learning. In summary, in having a relationship with theory the suggestion is that it is not the theory that determines the impact it has on a trainee, but how the theory is incorporated, understood and used; “*with experience there is a kind of a taking theory into oneself, an integration, things become more intuitive*”.

#### **4.2.2 Theory reveals the trainee’s experience**

The most frequently reported impact of theory was that it helped to reveal experience for the trainee by opening up new and useful ways of seeing and thinking about the emotional response experience. Trainees who were impacted in this way considered this positively, because it assisted them in unpicking confusing situations from practice and making them more comprehensible; one participant comments that “*theory increases understanding, elucidates, and helps prise apart*” the emotional response experience. Of particular prominence was that theory enabled meaning to be made from the experience, hence ***the trainee uses theory to make meaning from their experience***

property. One participant simply stated, “*It explains why I feel like that*”.

Something that often accompanied the desire to make sense of an experience was a desire to know what actions could be taken as a result of the understanding.

Many trainees indicated that theory provided a guideline for them regarding what could be done with the experience, and the property *theory informs the trainee what to do with their experience* refers to this. This component of theory frequently contributed to the direction of the clinical work as one participant explains, “*theory, I think, is behaviour through that lens, it helps me understand [client’s] behaviour and modulates my emotional response to [them] ... it does affect whether I act or not, I suppose I ... make a more informed decision*”.

The third property is *theory provides the trainee with a name for their experience* and this refers to the many experiences that are described using theoretical terms and language. As one might expect, use of theoretical terminology was extremely common, and the researcher noted the way shared use amongst participants connected them through social group and context. Throughout the data, many references were made to various models, theories and terminology including: cognitive-behavioural, person-centred, psychodynamic, transpersonal, five levels of relationship, integrative, the core conditions, vicarious trauma, object relations, attachment, character styles, common factors, enactment, transference, relational methodology, mindfulness, two person psychology and intersubjectivity. However, the most named, and often favoured by trainees because it helped them with “*understanding experience and informing the relationship*”, was the psychoanalytic/psychodynamic theory countertransference. Speaking of this theory a participant commented “*I didn’t have those words a few years ago so I don’t know how I would have understood my emotional experience without them*”.

Frequently such named theories were viewed as highly revealing of their experiences, and sometimes even essential in the making sense of, and working with, emotional responses. However, often data simultaneously highlighted incidents of uncertainty,

scepticism or a difficulty in recognising the presence of theory at all, as now described.

#### 4.2.3 *Theory conceals the trainee's experience*

The second impact of theory was that it could conceal aspects of the experience for the trainee. Researching the nature of something that is concealing can present difficulties, and its differences from impacts (3) and (4) are at times subtle. Despite this, this category's first property *the trainee's use of theory replaces their experience* could be seen in actions and processes, as well as the spoken views of participants. Some descriptions of experience were descriptions of theory, as though the theory was understood to be, or to replace, their experience. This would be more than use of theoretical terminology to help describe an experience, because elements of the experience would be hidden. Although there are connections, *the trainee's use of theory replaces their experience* differs to *the trainee has limited awareness about when they are using theory* (property of *the trainee's inability to perceive the impact of theory*), because this refers to concealment of experience by theory, as opposed to an integration of theory and experience.

The participants who recognised this potential concealment of their experience with theory made observations such as “*I suppose there's that temptation to make it fit, which concerns me*”. There was also recognition of the problem of misunderstanding, or having an incomplete understanding of theory. Participants acknowledged the potential for theory to be stifling in their practice, particularly those who considered that theory attempts to “*explain something that is not entirely explainable*”. However, whether it is possible for trainees to put aside a theory once it has been learnt or not, is questionable.

The second property, *the trainee disregards alternative meanings for their experience*, can be seen when trainees select one theory or concept with which to make sense of their experience, then, to the extent that this theory is believed to be true and is unquestioned, that one interpretation is made to the exclusion of all others. This might have its advantages (e.g. simplicity), but it also risks neglecting other possibilities and explanations that could have proved fruitful in working with the experience and the client. Speaking of a previous supervisor and colleagues, one participant expresses this concern while observing others being stifled by theory: “*Sometimes they’ll say ‘oh well then that was the transference’ ...I think well actually I’m not sure ... it doesn’t quite fit, and then you can see that you could say whatever, they’re dead bent that that’s exactly what it is*”. Another participant acknowledges a way that therapists could use theory inappropriately to disregard difficulties that they bring to the relationship: “*I suppose ... it’s easier to blame more negative feelings on the client and say well that’s their stuff*”. However, disregarding alternative meanings of experience may be less to do with theory and more to do with the therapist, whose interpretation is key and to whom theory “*means different things for different clients*” and in different situations.

The third property of the concealing experience impact, *criticisms the trainee makes about theory*, captures the more challenging views and perceived disadvantages of theory in relation to the way trainees make sense of their emotional response experiences. Often, there was emphasis that the relationship with the client was of higher priority than the theory, for example, “*I still think I should do what I think is right for my client, whether I’ve got a theory backing it up or not really*”. Learning and development that did not come from theory was also argued to be of great importance: “*What’s more important for a therapist is their personal development*

*rather than any of the theories*”. In addition, opinions about problematic features of theories were shared, including “*some of the theories I react against, one, because they sound incredulous, and two, because some of them are just too complex*”, and speaking of theoretical concepts, “*it sounds so way off base if you’re trying to talk to lay person about it*”.

#### 4.2.4 *Theory raises uncertainty in the trainee*

The third impact of theory was that it could raise uncertainty for trainees. The first of its properties *the trainee’s experience of conflicting theories or proponents of theory* focuses on how differences that exist between theoretical models, particularly where there are perceived incompatibilities, create confusion and can generate ambiguity when the trainee is to interpret their experience. Similarly, proponents of a theory or theoretical model such as supervisors, personal therapists or tutors can raise uncertainty, particularly when those from different theoretical orientations disagree about how to interpret an experience. This property relates closely to *the trainee’s relationship with their role models* property of *the nature of the trainee’s relationships*. Speaking of the effect of training in and practicing different theoretical models in clinical practice, participants explain “*I feel like I’ve got a background of working in lots of different ways... but I also find that I feel really confused lots of the time as to what the hell I’m doing*”, and, “*I think some things we learn are not compatible*”. Participants expressed their struggle with integrating theoretical models “*you need to get the right ingredients and for them to be there in the right quantities... I don’t know about that yet, I don’t know about what goes with what*”; their struggle with confusing guidance, “*the difficulty is that sometimes my therapist and the tutors are doing or saying different things*”; and whether it is

possible to separate conflicting theoretical approaches in practice “*once you think about countertransference and unconscious communication it’s hard not to think about it... it makes it very confusing*”.

The second property of *theory raises uncertainty in the trainee* category is closely related to *the trainee’s personal and professional development* over time and highlights ***the trainee’s position that theory is meaningless until it is experienced in practice***. Prior to a point in clinical practice when a trainee experiences what a theory that they have learnt is really about, they can remain uncertain about its meaning, as one participant explains: “*it’s only through the clinical work and linking practice to theory that theories came alive... without the clinical practice the theories are just, on some level meaningless*”.

The third property ***the trainee’s concern with issues of ownership or entanglement of emotional material in practice*** frequently refers to the most named theory for making sense of emotional responses, countertransference. The property highlights the common uncertainty that is generated in relation to the theory’s central questions about whether an emotional response ‘belongs to’ the client or the therapist, or some combination of these. A participant describes her reluctance to work with her emotional response experiences for this reason, and desire to keep things clear and separate: “*That’s yours, this is mine*”. Prior to her training in psychodynamic theory, this participant’s belief about her emotional responses was “*that’s my stuff, I shouldn’t be confusing the client with that*”, but reported realising later that “*they are too intermingled and too inter-related to even try and separate them*”. In addition to the uncertainty that arose from trying to make sense of who and where the emotional response experience originated, participants also puzzled over what became

of it in the work; “*I don’t know quite what happened quite with it, I don’t know who is carrying it even*”.

#### 4.2.5 *The trainee’s inability to perceive the impact of theory*

The fourth impact highlights the undefined nature of theory, and points to difficulties trainees had in detecting theory within the process of making sense of an emotional experience. The problem of recognising theory’s role when thinking about experience saw some participants struggle in a number of ways. This category’s first property *the trainee finds theory inseparable from their making-sense process* describes a sequence of occurrences whereby thinking about the experience seems to be automatically accompanied by trying to make sense of it sense of it, and, often theory is embedded in the making-sense process, resulting in an inability to separate these aspects. The inseparability indicated, made studying the impact of theory almost impossible to speak about for some, because it was not mentally represented as something independent. A participant grappling with these relationships described viewing her experience as the “*starting point*” but the impact of theory on her understanding as a “*circular process*” because her experience and the theory would feed into one another in such a way as to create “*no starting point*”. Further indications for this category were present in the actions and processes in the data.

The second property has similarities with the first but *the trainee’s difficulty thinking about theory and their experience at the same time* this time refers to a more conscious and verbalised struggle in thinking about trainee’s experience and their use of theory at the same time. For example it was thought about and described by one participant as “*hard to think about, it’s so abstract it’s hard to get straight in your mind*”. Another participant suggested that she needed time to reflect on her

experience before theory could be used, and considered the two occurring together to be either the “*height of attunement with yourself*” or “*contrived*”.

The third property of inability to perceive impact is ***the trainee has limited awareness about when they are using theory***. As the name suggests, it was indicated that trainees were not always sure when theory was in use in the way that they had made sense of their experience. This focuses more on awareness rather than uncertainty, as seen in *theory raises uncertainty in the trainee*.

Participant comments reflect this limited awareness: “*I think I kind of unconsciously integrate things ... they just become mine and I don’t really know where they’ve come from*”; and, “*even though I may not even be consciously thinking about theory, I’m sure it’s there in the background*”. They acknowledge a process of theoretical introjection or involvement that occurs within them, and this further supports an existence of what the researcher describes as their relationship with theory.

#### 4.2.6 ***The trainee’s personal and professional development***

The degree to which the impact categories were experienced depended on what the influence categories and their properties were like for trainees. This category refers to the personal and professional development of the trainee during the course of the training programme, and this is understood to make a substantial contribution to what the relationship with theory is like.

Time was an important factor for participants in this study, in particular, their change over time, as this category’s first property ***it takes time for the trainee to incorporate theory into their practice*** indicates. Participants reported memories and gave accounts of before, during and after an experience occurred, in relation to their



making sense process with theory, for example “*in the beginning I didn’t really get it, it’s taken me a while to understand how this is actually helpful*”, and hindsight, “*a lot of it is now me being able to reflect back historically with additional learning and to see what was going on*”. Participants made comparisons between the past and present, some expressed a desire to have known theory earlier for use in practice: “*If only I knew this 6 months ago because that would have been really useful with that client*”. Some trainees observed that less training could sometimes equate with being less thoughtful about theory, increasing the likelihood of a trainee using theory to unhelpfully label and be judgmental in their client-work. Conversely, other trainees considered the way not knowing theory might have helped them in their development, for example “*naivety allowed me to be perhaps more receptive to different things*”.

Participants acknowledged how the time taken to develop professionally was important, and some reflected on the necessity to revisit earlier theoretical learning later on, “*I’ll go back to stages that I haven’t really embodied yet*”, and, “*why did that not resonate, it resonates now; there’s something to do with the time aspect and where I’m at in my journey*”. Participants also acknowledged the difference between learning about a theory, and really understanding a theory; the latter involved incorporating or embodying a theory, and took time. This learning was key in the process of personal and professional development for these trainee counselling psychologists.

The second property of this influence category, the trainee’s personal and professional development, is ***the trainee learns to trust their own experience***. For the trainee this meant becoming more able to attend to and make use of their own experience in their practice. This was realised by a participant who felt she had been

negatively impacted by having failed to do this “*I know now that I should trust my gut reactions and should attend to them more*”. Trusting one’s experience might enable the trainee to make use of theory in a way that is more congruent with that experience, a participant describes this as “*I learn from the inside out*” the same participant also puts into words why this is necessary “*it has to make sense to me ... I have to have experience to fully embody a theory*”.

However, attending to their own experience can present a real challenge for some: “*I’m not very good with emotional responses because ... I like things to be logical... goes against the grain for me*”; and can mark a point of change in the trainee’s development: “*there have been a couple of really pivotal moments during the training where I have taken a risk and dared to believe that my experience is true for me, whether or not ... it makes sense to anybody else*”. A personal experience can unite and inform their personal and professional selves: “*having lost the very thing I was terrified of losing and survived... I think that was probably the biggest epiphany, that I can hold this ... because of that I can believe my experience*”. For one participant, practicing mindfulness helped him to develop personally in a way that was valuable professionally “*I’m more open to my own experience whereas I might have been avoidant about things in the past... in being more present to myself I can be more present to my client, it’s kind of changed me very much more than any formal learning or training programmes*”.

The third and final property of the trainee’s personal and professional development is ***the trainee’s grasp of counselling psychology ethos***. Some differences were present in the degree to which theory was accepted as an explanation of the participant’s emotional response. These differences were also present with regards to

how relational, integrative, pluralist and post-modernist ideas were thought about, understood and practiced by trainees.

Frequently trainees expressed that relational and ‘common factors’ in therapy were more central to the work than theory, for example: “*Looking at a client from different perspectives, it sort of feels like you get to the same point anyway, you just call it different things*”. Although both advantages and disadvantages of learning several theoretical models for use in clinical practice were raised, the predominant view was that having the choice of theories and models was of benefit, because it “*allows you to become more receptive to different ways of working and different ways of thinking*”. An openness to, and consideration of, many theories, ideas and multiple truths was seen in varying degrees in trainees. Some appreciated the way their training programmes built up theoretical concepts before knocking them down “*so that you can really think outside the box*”.

Finally, it was clear that developing an understanding of the counselling psychology ethos could take time and patience: “*Holding the tension’... was very, very uncomfortable in the early years and now I think that I’m just getting it*”. However, this element of personal and professional development appeared to give shape and form to the trainee’s ontology and epistemology, enabling them to process an experience in a way that they “*wouldn’t have been able to do previously*”.

#### **4.2.7 The nature of the trainee’s relationships**

This category highlights how the nature of the relationships that the trainee has with key people can make an important contribution to the trainees learning during their training, including, to their relationship with theory. The first property, ***the trainee’s relationship with their role models***, captures the influence of the trainee’s

relationships with those that might be considered professional role models, usually supervisors, personal therapists, tutors, or peers.

The way, and the extent to which, participants spoke of these relationships in making sense of their emotional responses to clients, conveyed something of their influence on the participant's processing of their experience. For example, some participants were dissatisfied with their supervision because they did not feel that they were well enough supported by their supervisor, particularly following a difficult experience with a client that would bring up strong feelings in the trainee: *"it was right at the beginning of my training, she was one of my first clients... I wasn't getting adequate supervision and I felt really out of my depth"*. Sometimes a supervisor's character was scrutinised along with the theoretical model that they worked within; some experienced their supervisors as less helpful when they were blinkered by their theory or when something the trainee considered important was not embraced in supervision (e.g. trainee's emotions).

A participant contrasts her preferred supervisor and supervision experience with her less helpful supervision experience elsewhere, trying to pin down what it was that was particularly helpful to her *"I think it's something more personal it's not just about the theory, I think it's an ability and presence as well, I think that supervisor, the good one, made the room quite containing"*. Participants shared examples of the supervisory advice given to them about what to do with their emotional response experience to the client in practice, much of which was found helpful, although was not always well tolerated by the trainee: *"my supervisor's advice was that I had to sort of bring it in the room and reflect on our relationship, which really was quite a challenge for me at that time"*.

Of course for some trainees, influence can come less from their supervisor and more their personal therapist, with whom a great deal of time during the training can be spent. Some participants were aware of modelling their therapist's interventions in their practice as a way of managing their emotional responses: "*Personal therapy... dominates the whole scene, this topography of different things, and ways of interpreting what's been happening, understanding what's been happening*". As an allocated person and place for the trainee's personal material, the therapist can be a greatly needed source of support when experiencing emotions in need of processing. Help through more collective input was also acknowledged, such as from a supervision group, peers and tutors; one participant described the importance of these people to her personal and professional development "*they can see the person that I haven't really dared to show to other people, they're seeing who I think I am, and the way that these relationships are stripped of the masks that are on the outside, enabled me to be who I am, and it reinforces it*". The trainee expresses how this development enabled her to attend to and make use of her own experience, in contrast, this next participant's relationship with others, at this time, was more about helping her to bear an emotional impact of a client on her "*it was almost too much, I just couldn't hold it by myself, I needed other people to also hold it and also support me*".

Recognising a mixture of influences from different sources was common, and taking something of that learning into the self was something that was happening for trainees but was not always very easily put into words; however this participant manages to capture this in saying "*my work with the therapist ... has a huge impact, all the different little models, supervisors in the past, supervisors in the present, some of tutors... I find myself inhabiting a similar subjectivity ... hearing myself through tutors voices and stuff, which is empowering in an experimental way*".

Other influences seen came from inspirational writers or theorists, for example a participant that had recently watched the video ‘Gloria’, then said of his interventions “*there was something of Carl Rogers in the room*”.

The second property of *the nature of the trainee’s relationship* category is ***the trainee’s relationship with their client***. The relationship between a trainee and their client was understood to influence the impact of theory on the way the trainee made sense of their emotional responses to the client. Influencing factors within this property include general beliefs (which may come from theory, experience or a role model) about what is important for their relationships with clients and how this might affect what they do in practice, also, the degree of personal difference between trainee and client, and the role of theory with regards to the therapeutic relationship.

Indications of what was thought to be important to the relationship with the client included features that spread across theoretical models such as the common factors, recognising each client’s uniqueness, and, being competent enough and sufficiently trained in order to offer the sort of help a client needed. However, the attention given to the quality of the relationship seemed to be the general priority expressed by participants: “*The relationship is paramount and that’s the base and the essence really*”. Putting this into practice meant that participants would attend to the relationship in ways that they understood to be helpful e.g. offering the core conditions. This included using their emotional response experiences in the work with their client, in one trainee’s words: “*Quite often I can get a felt sense and report back to them, [and] say I wonder if you’re feeling this*”. Using their emotional responses in this way was found to be both helpful, and, problematic and confusing by participants (see *the trainee’s concern with issues of ownership and entanglement of emotional material*). One participant describes his experience of staying with his

compassion for his client: *“The real relationship, ... recognising there are two human beings ... talking to each other in this room at this moment and the depth of feeling [it] warrants, to a certain extent, [makes it so that] me as a therapist and him as a client don’t really exist at those pinpoints”*.

Another contributing factor to the trainee’s relationship with the client was the extent to which they were similar or different to one another, for example, *“his world and his values are very different to mine, so it was hard to know what to do without getting into a battle about your values versus my values”*. Just as some participants described liking clients that were in some way like themselves, clients reported to be difficult for participants were often those that were most different to them. A participant described how she used theory to help her manage her dislike felt towards a client: *“I keep reminding myself why I am there, and that there have been things that have led to our differences... all the things that we know about theory; ... try hard to remember those things rather than going with your gut feeling”*. Some trainees expressed a strong desire to not have to work with clients that elicited negative emotional responses in them, e.g. *“I think it would have let me off the hook if she had decided that she didn’t want counselling... because I knew I didn’t feel able to work with her”*.

Finally, consideration was given to the influence of the therapeutic relationship with regards to how active theory was in the work. Sometimes theory appeared to function as a secondary source of information in the work, as if it were of minimal importance. A participant explained how early in her training before much theory had been learnt *“clients would still come back ... so there was that sort of engagement that was still there even without the knowledge of the different... theories to make sense of them all”*. Similarly, promoting the relationship with the client over theory in practice, a trainee explains: *“sometimes in these moments of intimacy, all the*

*theory that we learn, it just sort of recedes*”. However, in other descriptions, theory functioned as a more constructive and central support for the relationship with the client, for example “*there was some awareness... of the theory allowing me to be congruent, giving me permission to feel the emotion... and not to be... a cardboard cut-out of a therapist*”. This last example suggests a focus on the therapeutic relationship that is, this time, based on theory.

Participants often thought about their client-work in terms of the circumstances surrounding the case, including the setting, the length of work, and the difficulties being addressed etc., as well as the quality of the therapist-client relationship informed by reflective practice. With all of this information, trainees made choices about how to best use theory in order to proceed with the work. *The trainee’s relationship with their client* can be understood then to influence their relationship with theory at that time. In comparison, a more long-standing influence came from the significant relationships that the trainee brought from their personal life and past, as described in the final property.

The third property of the *nature of the trainee’s relationships* category is ***the trainee’s relationship with their family of origin***. This property resembles the importance of a trainee’s family of origin, and general relational history as an influence of their relationship with theory. Although the trainee’s family of origin was spoken about by them less often than supervisors, clients, personal therapists or tutors during interviews, there was acknowledgment in many of the examples of their emotional responses to clients in practice, that their personal material had to be considered, in order to clarify the likelihood that the emotional response was not related to the client or the work together. Examples of influences from their families given in this context included the support from them, or lack of understanding from



them in relation to their training; patterns in emotional regulation and expression learnt from parents; dynamics in families that led to the trainee taking on a particular role with the client in practice; and, stressful circumstances causing emotional upheaval, that may or may not have been confused with the clients emotional processes as part of the work.

#### 4.2.8 *Relieving the impact of the trainee's experience*

A category strongly associated with the relationship between theory and the experience investigated, and seen to connect with the other categories, was named *relieving the impact of the trainee's experience* by the researcher. Trainees indicated that the experience of having emotional responses to clients did have an impact on them. Often difficult experiences were shared at interview and the anxiety and uncertainty raised saw trainees search for answers and ways to relieve themselves of the feelings that had been provoked or had arisen in them. This category emerged as a possible answer to an unasked question, 'why is theory used by trainees to make sense of their experience', and was described by, and seen in the actions and processes of the interviewed trainees.

Descriptions from participants supporting this category, include those expressing the impact of the emotional response experience on them, "*I felt unsafe because it was just a shock that this had happened, I wasn't quite sure how to respond*", "*I felt so embarrassed and uncomfortable*", "*oh god what is this I need to get rid of it*", and, "*without countertransference theory I would have thought I was going mad*". Trainees expressed a 'need' to do something with the emotional response experience; "*it was very, very important for me to make sense of it and help me to process it*". What the theory did for the trainees in making sense of their

emotional responses (this also fits with the first four categories) was seen in comments such as “*it gave me some kind of frame to process it intellectually*”, “*these theoretical concepts... gave me more of a place that I could hold it*”, and, “*just having some kind of hook to hang it on ... was helpful as a means to make some sense of what it might be, and I think after that I did probably start to process it and it became tolerable*”.

In addition to theory, other people’s input and support featured clearly in relieving the impact of the trainee’s experience, “*things are much better if handled in relationship*” ... and, “*without the training or being able to share it, you know the relational bits, I would have been left carrying that*”. Relieving the impact of the trainee’s experience may imply that emotional feelings, in addition to those that exist as the emotional response experience, are present in trainee’s thinking about theory (this connects back to one’s relationship with theory). For example, in describing the help and hindrance of the multiple-theory, postmodern approach encouraged in counselling psychology training programmes, a participant explains “*it helps you from being lulled into this false sense of security, but then at the same time I think a false sense of security would be very helpful and settling and secure, and that’s something that we’re not going to get now*”.

### **4.3 Theoretical saturation of categories**

Theoretical saturation of categories occurs when new data no longer produces any new properties or theoretical developments for the core categories. Although this feature of data analysis is well known to grounded theorists, the researcher considers that it is often an unrealistic achievement to saturate categories and agrees with Dey (1999) who suggests the term ‘theoretical sufficiency’ is more fitting. Dey contends that

categories are suggested by data, rather than saturated by data. Further, the researcher takes the perspective that new meaning is always on the horizon, therefore, while the researcher can state with certainty that the categories are grounded in the data as demonstrated, she does not feel it is accurate to claim all categories to be saturated.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Literature Review

#### 5.1 Introduction to the literature review

The purpose of this chapter is to look at existing literature in order to open up and gain a better understanding of the study findings. As indicated in earlier chapters, most of the literature reviewed for this research was done so after the analysis of data, in line with grounded theory recommendations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By minimising exposure to previous research and existing theoretical material before analysing the research data, the intention was to increase the likelihood that the grounded theory generated by the researcher was grounded in the data as opposed to ideas brought in from elsewhere. In Strauss & Corbin's (1990) words, "there is no need to review all of the literature beforehand, because if we are effective in our analysis, then new categories will emerge that neither we, nor anyone else, had thought about previously" (p.50). The researcher acknowledges that this methodological approach does not account for the influence of theories and research already known to the researcher, so this and associated practical issues are addressed in the discussion chapter.

This literature review chapter falls into five areas. Two of these areas thread their way through the whole research, the first, refers to the background and context of counselling psychology as the discipline from which the participants speak; and the second, refers to features of the participants' training and development in becoming counselling psychology practitioners. The importance of these areas is reflected in the categories found to affect *the trainee's relationship with theory* and the impact of

theory on the way they make sense of their emotional responses to clients. The remaining three areas are central to the study and include the making sense of experience, the emotional response experience, and theory.

## **5.2 Background and context**

The findings and subsequent meanings taken from this research, as for any research, should be placed within their broader context, where historic, cultural, political, environmental and societal influences can be considered. Holding such influences in mind allows for a more holistic perspective to be taken and this is central to the values and ethos of the counselling psychology discipline. Amongst these broad influences however, there are of course ideas and practices that challenge the mainstream counselling psychology perspective. An important example would be the illness versus well-being debate, and the dominance of the medical model in current culture. It is in medical settings alongside psychiatrists and clinical psychologists that much of counselling psychology practice takes place (Cheshire & Pilgrim, 2004), and this is particularly true of the researcher's experience in practice. The challenge is that, "it is here the power of technical rationality and the forces of rationalization are felt most strongly" (Woolfe, Dryden & Strawbridge, 2003, p.17), and medical and non-medical settings alike tend to adopt biomedical language and practices that subject individuality to scientific judgment (Rose, 1990), and powerful cultural assumptions accompany this. Such 'expert diagnoses' encourage a relationship of dependency where the 'powerless' patient awaits rescue by the 'omnipotent' professionals (Parsons, 1951; Johnstone, 2000), and while the medical model takes little account of the social, economic or political context in which a person exists (Pilgrim & Rogers, 1996; Woolfe, Dryden & Strawbridge, 2003, p.17), this is unlikely to change. The

implications of this, with regards to the relationship between theory and experience, is that an assumption has been made that theory can be believed, without question, to explain what an experience is.

Interdisciplinary voids or gaps in communication and thinking are likely to be to the detriment of the cause with which the disciplines are involved. Pilgrim and Rogers (2005) describe how the investigation into social aspects of mental health suffers due to the alienated relationship between psychiatry and sociology. They highlight the way “psychiatry ... sought greater medical respectability, with a biomedical approach returning to the fore”, whereas “social psychiatry and its underpinning biopsychosocial model became ... marginalised and weakened” (p.228). Pilgrim and Rogers recognise that psychiatry’s position is as critical realist, and sociology’s is as social constructivist, and that both paradigms contribute to the creation of a ‘blocked dialectic’ that results in the disciplines not talking, or, talking past one another. Similarly, Gergen (1999) writes of tensions in contemporary society, particularly in universities, “conflicts are labelled in varying ways in differing sectors and with differing emphases: foundationalism vs. post-foundationalism, structuralism versus post-structuralism, empiricism versus post-empiricism, colonial versus post-colonial and most popularly, modernism versus post-modernism”. Gergen adds, “it is difficult to communicate across the divide” (p.3).

Giving consideration to the background and context of counselling psychology is helpful to the researcher in a number of ways. Firstly, identifying paradigms, worldviews, and perspectives in operation within counselling psychology (e.g. therapeutic models such as psychodynamic, humanistic, cognitive behavioural; the medical model; or social or evolutionary perspectives) can be an important part of understanding the influences upon the trainee and their way of viewing the world and

their practice. This includes those perspectives that may be in the minority within the discipline, or that reach across disciplines; for example, some psychiatrists influenced by constructivism make pleas for methodological pluralism and multiple theorisations and they encourage sociological inquiry into the practical world of their profession (Bracken & Thomas, 2001; Thornicroft & Szmuckler, 2001).

A second useful point regarding the consideration of background and context is that it allowed the researcher to consider the notion that a blocked dialectic, or inability to communicate between perspectives, may be a process that is within and not just between practitioners as well as disciplines. Psychotherapeutic traditions commonly acknowledge the disruption or distress that a person's conflicting 'parts of the self' can produce, and it seems reasonable to take this to include conflicting ideas held by a person.

A third and useful point taken from considering the breadth of a more contextual perspective, is a reminder that methodology, not just the study topic, is open to evaluation; that is, grounded theory also brings with it a history and a context in which it was developed that may influence the study findings. For example, Dey (2007) wrote about the 'codification' of grounded theory, and questions the way in which this form of analysis grounds the theory in the data. Grounded theory emerged at a time when qualitative research required a more systematic approach in order to convince researchers it could be an acceptable alternative to quantitative research, and later, it met demand for explicit procedural guidelines as it became more widely used. Therefore, the researcher should acknowledge the way coding the data will have shaped and organised the resulting grounded theory. Even though a constructivist approach to grounded theory makes no unrealistic claims about accuracy, Charmaz (2006) states, "the researcher constructs concepts that count for relationships defined

in the empirical data and each concept rests on empirical indications” (p.187).

Acknowledgment of the different approaches to grounded theory and its philosophical evolution is described by Annells (1996) whose research suggests:

Understanding of grounded theory method is partly dependent on an awareness of the method's ontological, epistemological, and methodological perspectives; the traditional symbolic interactionist theoretical underpinnings; and the identification of the relevant paradigm of inquiry within which the method resides (p.379).

Annells also sees grounded theory to be evolving towards the constructivist inquiry paradigm, a direction that in Gergen’s (1999) view contains enormous potential for the future. Gergen states that social constructionism (theoretical perspective within same paradigm) “welcomes both the voices of tradition and critique into dialogue, while granting neither an ultimate privilege. Commitments do not require rigidity, nor critique eradication of the past.” (p.4). However, while this evolution is necessary as times and contexts change, Mollon (2009) anticipates this further when he says, “we may have to wait for the emergence of some, as yet entirely unknown, new paradigm. Admitting our ignorance at least enables us to be open to new observations and perspectives” (p.136).

### **5.2.1 The applied psychology position**

There has always been healthy debate within psychology, perhaps in part because the discipline has tended to straddle a number of schools given its roots in philosophy, its development as a science and its spread into fields that offer alternative ways of seeing the world (e.g. social, philosophical etc.). The term ‘scientist practitioner’ is thought to distinguish the applied psychologist from their non-psychologist, therapeutic and mental health colleagues, and Blair (2010) recently reviewed the scientist-practitioner



model and its relevance to counselling psychology. Blair notes, “the scientist practitioner will be capable of *reflecting* on his practice. During practice, this involves *framing and testing hypotheses* regarding the client, being *open to change* and *re-formulating ideas* in the face of evidence” (p.20; italics authors own). Woolfe, Dryden & Strawbridge (2003) add that reflection continues outside of practice and involves the use of supervision, continuing professional development, a self-critical stance, and openness to experience.

Davison (1998) suggested that the scientist-practitioner model of training in applied psychology could not be realized where there was interference from particular factors, including, resistance to empirically supported treatments (ESTs) from “academic faculty and internship supervisors who have an investment in approaches of longer standing but with less empirical justification”; and, ESTs, often derived from studies that use treatment manuals and usually associated with categorically defined diagnostic categories, suggests reliance on an approach that can “constrain clinician behaviour”, and risk losing sight of “the idiographic analysis of single cases”. Consequently Davison recognises that “synthesis of this dialectic poses a significant challenge to the continuing development of the science and profession of applied psychology” (p.163). Such incongruences might explain the popularity of Schön’s (1984) reflective practitioner model, which might be more in line with the counselling psychology ethos, professional role, and identity that will be revisited later.

Recently however, many applied psychologist’s arguments have been directed towards possible changes to existing professional roles and identities as a result of the move from British Psychological Society (BPS) regulation to statutory regulation. This caused concern for many psychologists, and similar feelings fuelled allied professions, counselling and psychotherapy, accredited with the British Association of Counselling

and Psychotherapy (BACP, 2011), and the United Kingdom Council of Psychotherapy (UKCP, 2011), to resist statutory regulation. The UK government's approach in determining the most effective talking therapies, which has focussed on measures of technical competence, economically driven outcomes, and measuring therapeutic effectiveness with randomized controlled trials, has been met with objection from many therapists because of the valuable data and practices that have been overlooked.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) has been favoured as the psychological therapy of choice, owing both to its adaptability to the desirable criteria, and promising results from some outcome studies. Some studies showed CBT to be as effective as antidepressant medication (e.g. Segal, Bieling, Young, MacQueen, Cooke, Martin, Bloch & Levitan, 2010), and this has been important for talking therapies and the government's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) initiative. CBT has received both increased praise and increased criticism as a result of the limelight set upon it by the government agenda, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommendations, and IAPT.

Athanasiades (2009) is hopeful that under current healthcare models counselling psychology can "consolidate its existing experience and channel its diverse resources into new ways of working that meet the needs of service users effectively" (p.15). Even if current changes mean counselling psychologists undertake more supervision and management and less clinical work, Athanasiades sees this as an opportunity to help shape services. However some, such as Pilgrim (2005), have found it necessary to emphasize the priorities for competence and effectiveness in therapy, saying:

Given the centrality of the relationship to the success or failure of therapy, technique is worth nothing unless it is underpinned consistently with a positive,

respectful and non-abusive stance towards the client. Personal integrity, not just technical competence, must be reliably present in the therapy trade (p.172).

Pilgrim construes the difficulty that some persons outside the field (e.g. policy makers, some medical professionals) appear to have with understanding this, and the difficulty integrating therapy with other areas of society. In comparison, Mollon (2009) expresses concern about the “huge agenda of control” that the NHS has exerted in recent years, in particular, objecting to the NICE guidelines, which he describes as:

An organ of the state that consumes our psychological discourse, our rich heritage, our multifaceted gems of brilliant theorising and observation around human nature and the human condition, our charismatic and visionary pioneers – such as Rogers, Maslow, Freud, Jung, Beck, Bowlby, Winnicott, Kelly – and homogenises all this into a bland and emotionally denuded prescription of CBT for everything (p.131).

Mollon believes the way that the NICE guidelines conceptualise client difficulties as ‘disease’ “inherently annihilates meaning and individuality by homogenising emotional distress” (p.131). To the extent that these or similar concerns about mainstream health in the UK are thought and felt by the counselling psychologist population, the co-existence of opposing approaches (e.g. illness versus well-being) will effect them and the work that they do.

Crowley (2010) discusses the frequency of organisational change in the NHS and its impact in terms of anxiety and identity confusion in her experience as an NHS employee. Organisational impacts on the applied psychologist might be obvious, for example, where there are limitations on the duration of therapy for clients who have chronic or severe difficulties, alternatively, such impacts might be more subtle and tied into the assumptions made within an organisation. Crowley speaks of the way

Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger, 1957) sees people “smooth out contradictions in their attitudes and behaviour to gain stability” (p.34) when facing cultural anxiety (Lopez-Pedraza, 1990) that might include the conflict between monotheism (the search for one truth), and polytheism, which embraces many truths or explanations.

### **5.3 Becoming a counselling psychologist**

The BPS division of counselling psychology was established relatively recently in 1994, and Farrell (1996) offers a description of some of the early developments in training. To train as a BPS accredited counselling psychologist, trainees must learn and practice two or more different therapeutic models, and therefore a number of theories. Training comprises opportunities to learn through experience of clinical practice with clients, supervision of clinical practice with supervisors and co-supervisees, personal therapy with a personal therapist, and, skills and theory with tutors and peers. Turner, Gibson, Bennetts & Hunt (2008) describe this “inter-related, multifaceted, and complex nature of [the therapist’s] learning”, acknowledging that it might arise in a variety of forms, including gradual, sudden or quickly clearing hazy thoughts, thoughts combined with memories, feelings, bodily sensations and/or images (p.178).

Whilst the value of theoretical learning is not disputed, many acknowledge that counselling psychology requires its trainees to be “developing and trusting an intuitive process within the therapeutic process which goes beyond the skilled application of theory and technique” (Hammersley, 2002, p.640). Other authors highlight difficulties regarding this element of the training, for example, Risq (2006) referred to disillusion in trainees of counselling psychology, and considered the expectation for trainees to become familiar with, and competent in, more than one approach to therapy as inherently destabilising. Lewis (2008) similarly, added that

trainee counselling psychologists face epistemological conflicts in training and emotional distress in response to multiple and diverse underlying philosophies (theoretical orientations). So it is understandable that Hofer (2001) indicates that more recent information on how students are making sense of a postmodern curriculum would be of value in informing us about personal epistemological development.

With the move towards a higher academic, doctoral level of training for counselling psychologists, Hammersley (2009) expresses concern that greater breadth in the training also means loss of depth. As it is, it is questionable whether counselling psychology's relative newness as a discipline, contributes to an underlying instability and an uncertain identity in its practitioners. Barbara Douglas (2010) former Chair of the BPS division of counselling psychology (DCoP) commented on the diversity of opinion amongst the division's members:

Our divisional diversity is represented in membership and on your Committee where a wide range of knowledge, philosophies, contexts, views, and particular areas of expertise are evident. Such diversity can be such a strength and simultaneously bring with it tensions that need acknowledgement. I guess that individually we sit at different points on a continuum of views and sometimes we veer towards folk whose views we believe we are more familiar with. Simultaneously we may have a tendency to make assumptions about others whose views we see as different to our own. This can result in polarised assumptions, perhaps epitomised in debates such as whether or not our Division should or should not merge with that of clinical psychology. I prefer to ask the question 'how do we ensure that our Division, which has so many strengths, can be experienced as a valued and valuable professional home for all its members?'

Douglas' comments highlight an issue around professional identity that exists within the counselling psychology field. The similarities between counselling and clinical psychology are increasingly acknowledged (Watkins, 1990; Thompson, 2006), and the disciplines face similar difficulties regarding their position within the wider context

(Thompson, 2006). However, some consider counselling psychology to have nothing unique (e.g. philosophy, approaches, values) that is not already part of an allied field (Kinderman, 2009; Jordan, 2009), and therefore consider a separate identity to be problematic. It might be that counselling psychology has aligned itself with clinical psychology for status, recognition and jobs (Hammersley, 2009), however, there is also the argument that counselling psychology is in a stronger position than clinical psychology because it has independence from the NHS and because its practitioners have self-examining therapeutic skills (Hammersley, 2009; Mollon, 2009).

### **5.3.1 Personal development and personal therapy**

This section of the chapter explores the personal development of the trainee, because it is likely to have a bearing on the way trainees understand and use theory in making sense of their emotional response experiences to clients.

Rogers (1951) suggests the purpose of a trainee's personal therapy from a client-centred perspective is not to remove all likelihood of conflict in the trainee or their personal needs from ever entering their therapy work, but to "sensitize him to the kind of attitudes and feelings the client is experiencing, and ... make him empathic at a deeper and more significant level" (p.433). Personal therapy for therapists is mostly seen as an invaluable component of training and is compulsory for UK trainee counselling psychologists today. Despite many years of research into the value of personal therapy for trainee therapists, it continues to be debated because findings are inconsistent and more evidence is needed before conclusions can be drawn (Greenberg & Staller, 1981).

Research suggests that the majority of trainees have found their personal therapy satisfactory and the outcome of therapy generally positive, whereas

unsatisfactory results were reported by 17% or more of the sample (Macaskill, 1988; Darongkamas, Burton & Cushway, 1994). Williams, Coyle & Lyons' (1999) survey of UK chartered counselling psychologists on their views on their personal therapy indicated that a high majority (88%) were in favour of personal therapy as a training requirement, and Grimmer and Tribe (2001) found that even those who did not have substantial experience of personal therapy had therapy validated as an effective psychological intervention. In contrast, Macaskill (1988) suggested that personal therapy in the early stages of training might have a deleterious effect on the therapist's work with patients, and further that no evidence was found to support the view that personal therapy significantly enhanced therapeutic effectiveness.

Therapeutic effectiveness is likely to be influenced by the personal well-being of the therapist, so research focussing on stress and coping in psychologists is valuable for several reasons. Rogers (1951) acknowledged the problem of professional training for therapists due to the "extent of personal distress and maladjustment, and the social demand for assistance" (p.429), and yet, there was a dearth of data on the area at that time. Cushway & Tyler (1994) identified that women and those with less experience reported higher stress levels, which is likely to account for the majority of the trainee counselling psychologist population in the UK. However, Darongkamas, Burton & Cushway's (1994) survey of 496 NHS clinical psychologists saw that a lower percentage of UK psychologists had experience of personal therapy compared with published samples of American psychologists, even though seventy-eight per cent said they were moderately or very stressed by the job.

The recognition that psychology training was a highly formative period professionally led Kuyken, Peters, Power, Lavender & Rabe-Hesketh (2000) to examine trainee clinical psychologist's psychological adaptation to practice. Findings

indicated psychological adaptation was initially in the normal range for employed adults, indicating resiliency in this population, but, in subsequent years of training, there were reports of work adjustment problems, depression and interpersonal conflict. The need for appropriate support for trainees, including assessment and management, was recommended following Huprich & Rudd's (2004) national survey in the United States to assess the frequency, type, and management of trainee impairment.

With the difficulties that can arise during training in mind, the particular value taken from personal therapy can vary as described by Williams, Coyle & Lyons (1999) whose factor analysis revealed that counselling psychologists made a distinction between learning about therapy itself, issues arising out of training, and dealing with personal issues, and that dealing with personal issues was their aim and motivation for therapy. Those who had more than the compulsory number of sessions, rated contributions of their personal therapy to understanding therapeutic relationships and processes more highly than those who had less. Williams, Coyle & Lyons suggest from their findings that "initial sessions may be used by trainees to explore personal issues, leading to a preoccupation with the self, and learning about therapy per se may only occur once this has been dealt with" (p.545).

Grimmer and Tribe (2001) studied the opinions of trainee and recently qualified counselling psychologists on the impact of mandatory personal therapy on their professional development, and reported positive outcomes including:

A sense of the self as a professional through developing reflexivity as a result of being in the role of client; socialization into a professional role through validation and normative experiences such as the therapist modelling good and poor practice; support during times of personal difficulty; and, personal development that leads to a perceived improved ability for the participant to distinguish between personal issues and those of the client (p.287).



Some of these benefits are reiterated by Risq & Target (2009) who discuss the meaning and significance of personal therapy in clinical practice, and acknowledge that personal therapy establishes self-other boundaries, allowing the trainee to better distinguish between self and client. Managing this difficulty is described by van Deurzen (1998) as learning to “balance a willingness to immerse myself in their preoccupations, with a clear retention of adequate boundaries in order to remain in charge and sane in the process” (p.98).

Finally, research on personal therapy in relation to theoretical orientation by Darongkamas, Burton & Cushway (1994) found that many psychologists that had experience of personal therapy were of a psychodynamic orientation, and that psychodynamic therapists chose psychodynamic or psychoanalytic therapists, whereas cognitive-behavioural therapists selected therapists of orientations other than their own. A few years earlier, Prochaska & Norcross (1983) observed the psychodynamic orientations experience renewed preference for personal therapy with eclecticism declining, and suggested a need for more integrative models of therapy.

### **5.3.2 Developing as a practitioner**

This section of the chapter explores existing research and literature on professional development, which is closely related to personal development. Its relevance to the trainee and theory is considered in the discussion chapter.

Before developing as a practitioner, we make a choice to become one. Holmes (1999) acknowledges that forms of personal gains can feature in the decision making to train in psychotherapy (or related fields), or influence choices about how to practice for psychotherapists, either consciously or unconsciously. For example, the need to address one’s own unresolved issues might draw a practitioner. Becoming aware of

what motivates a trainee in their choice of profession is important, whether this is about power, recognition, reward or purpose. Nietzsche (1887/1956) stated “[m]an would sooner have the void for his purpose, than be void of purpose” (p.299); and this may be particularly true for the (trainee or qualified) practitioner in a therapeutic relationship who feels they are unable to be purposeful. It is understandable that not feeling able to help their client may fill the therapist with anxiety, and may see them search and take hold of potential solutions, such as theories, that offer direction and purpose to them in their work.

To develop as a practitioner of counselling psychology, knowing oneself is necessary because “one’s theoretical and personal beliefs bias one’s views of the situation, and therefore, of one’s interventions” (van Deurzen, 1998, p.93). Carl Rogers’ described this in terms of ‘mental filters’ whereby information perceived would be subject to evaluation, and if it was considered to be threatening or contradictory to the person’s self-concept (the beliefs held about themselves), it would be omitted or modified before being permitted to enter the conscious mind (Tallis, 1998, p.117). This idea is recognised across several different theoretical orientations with some variation in terminology, one version of which is, “conflict within a person causes them anxiety, and defences come into operation in order to reduce that anxiety” (p.104). If defences work to distort or deny information, allowing the discomfort from the anxiety and conflicting thought and feelings to be managed and to become more tolerable, then Tallis (1998) suggests the cost of defensiveness is to lose touch with reality.

In order to better know ourselves and address our biases, Harris & Huntingdon (2001) and Goffman (1959) emphasize the need to question one’s assumptions about knowledge, access our inner resources and “find ways to challenge

any internalised oppression we may experience as we struggle to manage potentially stigmatised aspects of our person(al) identities” (Harris & Huntingdon, 2001, p.137). Harris & Huntingdon write of the value of active reflection as a source of important information, an analytic tool, a way to monitor our responses and develop the ability to trust yet remain sceptical of our reactions (p.137). Similarly, van Deurzen (1998) emphasises the need for candid reappraisal, which means spotting ones own errors and being open to your own and other’s scrutiny; also, learning professionally from events long past, “the wisdom hidden in each situation is released in small doses as and when we are ready to read the message. Lessons drawn from the same experience will vary over time, according to the new perspectives that we acquire” (p.87).

We cannot foresee our clients and their affect on us, “there will always be new life experiences that shake you out of your world in such a way as to question all of your previous learning. If the issues you are newly confronted with dovetail with those of your client, then extra caution and supervision are needed” (van Deurzen, 1998, p.100). In such situations, active reflection can be enhanced by guidance and support from others who can help with learning and development. Risq (2009) offers an excellent account of the way tutors are utilised constructively by trainees in their “quest for personal transformation and professional recognition” (p.363). Similarly Davies (2008) describes the way social conditions of training institutions, in particular, instruction from seniors, can direct trainees’ practice to be inclusive or closed in their therapeutic adherence, and suggests following instruction in this way is as a result of being susceptible to the stress and anxiety imposed by the institution. However, the desire to learn from those one admires can lead to disillusionment, as was the case for van Deurzen (1998) whose experience confirmed to her that “it is important to intervene on the basis of one’s insight into life and from a sense of one’s own struggles

with life: in other words, from a personal rather than a theoretical position” (p.95).

Decades earlier, Rogers (1951) was supportive of the move away from technique towards the ‘attitudinal orientation’ of the counsellor, and considered that the most important goal in training was for the trainee to clarify and understand his own basic relationship to other people.

Knowing ourselves and knowing the other comprises much of what personal development for the trainee counselling psychologist is about, and yet we cannot help but get caught up in the way we frame information. Our involvement with theoretical approaches appears to have the power to define and separate us through theoretical differences, which are often insignificant. Below, an existential, human-focussed excerpt discussing personal development is contrasted with an integrative, control-focussed excerpt written in the same year.

If we are to help clients get a grip on the paradoxes that elude them, we must be prepared to be exposed to these paradoxes ourselves. In the process we will be subjected to continuous challenges and confronted with ever new aspects of human experience. Relentless self-examination and reflection are required to deal with them and make sense of them, when it becomes apparent that we do not yet grasp the full extent of our client’s difficulties. Together with them, we must expect to be faced with new complications and mysteries and we must be ready for critical reconsideration of set ideas about life (van Deurzen, 1998, p.101).

We need the skills to know ourselves, making a conscious effort at self-exploration of our own personal control profile and dynamics and how this affects countertransference issues; the assumptions of our professional orientation and its influence on views of relationship, assessment, and techniques selected; beliefs about personal control and how these affect opinions about when a client is exercising too much responsibility and when too little, and the values and ethics by which we practice (Shapiro & Astin, 1998, p.151).

Given such efforts and enthusiasm to know ourselves in order to know the other and offer something helpful to our clients in practice, there remains a great deal of uncertainty and debate regarding what we mean by the ‘self’. There are numerous theories about self (e.g. Clarkson’s seven-level model, 1993, 2003), but there is not scope to address how helpful such concepts are here; however, some related ideas about being and knowing are discussed shortly.

#### **5.4 Making sense of experience**

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1927/1962) considers ‘sense’ “in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something” (p.151). This simple description gives shape to making sense of experience, a process central to this research. This section of the chapter discusses the contribution of a few different authors and theories in order to compare and contrast perspectives and ways of making sense of the world. It also considers our inherent need to attribute concepts to our experiences to make them more understandable, and what it is like for us when we cannot, or try not to do this.

There is an abundance of therapeutic approaches offering therapists theories to guide, direct or explain experience; however, Maslow (1966) would argue, “there is no substitute for experience, none at all. All of the other paraphernalia of communication and of knowledge – words, labels, concepts, symbols, theories, formulas, sciences – are all useful only because people already knew them experientially” (p.45). In comparison, Gordon (2000) stresses the need to develop alternative perspectives acknowledging the importance of individual interpretations and meanings over the theoretical assumptions that reflect current professional perspectives, and argues that by adopting this type of approach to research, our understanding of the nature of psychotherapy or counselling psychology will be advanced. It is to this advancement that

the present study contributes, by exploring the impact of theoretical assumptions and their relationship with the trainee counselling psychologist's experience in practice. This study focuses on epistemology, however the researcher appreciates that part of what the knowing is about is felt sense experience, and therefore, ontology and being. Consequently some attention is given to Heidegger's ideas around ontology because they add another dimension to the making sense process, and, contribute by way of Heidegger's method of communication itself (this will be clarified shortly).

Earnshaw (2006) relays some central Heideggerian ideas, and does so using much of Heidegger's own terms and language. In brief, this includes that each person has the character or mode of Dasein (being-there/there-being), which is the part of a human that questions its being, and how it is that he or she exists. Dasein understands itself through this existence, through questioning, and may choose to be itself or to not be itself. Heidegger explains that our being-in-the-world, being-with-Others (other things, other people like oneself), and anxiety, are part of and therefore inseparable from Dasein, not additional to it. Earnshaw describes Heidegger's philosophy on how it is possible for Dasein to get lost in the being-with-Others or the 'they', how this allows Dasein to dissolve into the 'they' where no-one is responsible and "Dasein is 'disburdened' of its Being" (p.64). But also how this may be a way "in which Dasein fails to take hold of its Being" (p.64), find its agency, and address its existence of Self. Van Deurzen (1998) summarises the views of Heidegger (1927/1962) and Sartre (1943/1956) by explaining that "people have no solid self, no essential substance to rely on; they are basically pockets of nothingness. It is this essential non-solidity that makes freedom and consciousness possible in the first place. The price to pay for openness and flexibility is a deep-seated sense of vulnerability: ontological insecurity, experienced as existential anxiety" (p.12).

From the researcher's perspective, gaining comfort from the 'they' and being-with-Others is a familiar idea, and being with someone or something other than the Self can be understood as a choice made to reduce ontological anxiety and "burden of being" (Earnshaw, 2006, p.64), or put another way, by filling the emptiness with substance. One interpretation of this notion would be that facing existential anxiety can be more bearable if it can be shared or carried by another (person, or theory). This interpretation might be a convenient construction made from Heidegger's text by the researcher, but this may be as he had intended. Heidegger tended to demonstrate his point more often than state it, and Earnshaw makes reference to the undisputed difficulty of Heidegger's writing and the 'indirect communication' in his language and hermeneutical method, suggesting that these "attempt to bring the reader to an understanding which cannot be reduced to the logic of the argument but is rather the reader's 'appropriation' of the writing" (p.72).

A second and significant contribution to this discussion from Heidegger (1943/1998) relates to the uncovering and covering of truth, as described by Gadamer (see p. 29). This dialectical relationship of un-concealment and concealment of reality affirmed by Heidegger and Gadamer is further described by Lawn (2006) who writes "Heidegger's general account of truth disclosure often works with its privation or opposite, concealment; as light is cast on one particular aspect of being, another immediately withdraws from view. Art, like other forms of truth, has the capacity to both reveal and conceal" (p.90). What can be taken from this is that placing the spotlight on one reality or truth can hide another, and this will apply to the use of any theory, such as those used to make sense of experiences in practice (and indeed all those referred to throughout this research). This idea, which became known to the

researcher prior to data collection and analysis, earned its way into the grounded theory and is discussed in the following chapter.

If one is informed by Heideggerian ideas, making sense of experience is something interpretable by being there (Dasein), with all that being there involves, such as existential anxiety. Attempts to make sense of experience might also be changeable depending on the reality (or theory) that is most visible, or, it may be more predictable for those who hold fast to one theory, who limit their truth. In contrast, George Kelly's personal construct theory indicates that the way we make sense of experience depends on the way we view experience. Kelly's (1963) description of the nature and meaning of experience is that "[t]here is a world which is happening all the time. Our experience is that portion of it which is happening to us", he goes on to say "[e]xperience is the extent of what we know – up to now. It is not necessarily valid. We may 'know' a lot of things that are untrue..." (p.171). Kelly states that our constructions of our experience may be invalid, and that what we know may not be 'knowing' at all, "[j]ust as the compass of experience is no guarantee of the validity of our personal constructs, neither does the duration of experience give us any such warranty...[k]nowing things is a way of letting them happen to us" (p.171).

Kelly's descriptions could either cast doubt in the mind of the trainee who tries to make sense of their experience regarding the validity of what they know, or else enable them to be more active in their experience, for example he states that "personal constructs are the tools of experience rather than its products merely" (p.183); and "[s]ometimes it is said that a person learns from experience .... It is the learning which constitutes the experience" (p.172). Personal development is understood to be dependent on flexibility of constructs; a person who "approaches his world with a repertory of impermeable constructs is likely to find his system unworkable through



the wider expanses of events. He will, therefore, try to constrict his experiences to the narrower ranges which he is prepared to understand” (p.172). Kelly goes on to explain that a person who is prepared to perceive events in new ways, who shows adaptability, may accumulate experience rapidly and this person’s construct system is likely to be growing in validity. Finally, putting his theory into perspective against other psychologies, Kelly refers to it as an “inner outlook”, an alternative to “scientific psychologies of the outer inlook”, and a “calculated step beyond the experiential psychologies of inner *inner* feelings” (p.183).

The desire to make sense of experience could itself be problematic, in addition to using approaches and theories that tell us how to do this. Cayne & Loewenthal (2007) write about researching the unknown in relation to psychotherapy and relational practice, and as part of this they explore the nature of therapeutic knowledge in comparison with other forms of knowledge. Their research has them consider “how we can develop ways of researching that which is difficult to speak of, thus cannot be taught and learned but which might be imparted and acquired in rather different ways” (p.203).

#### 5.4.1 Knowledge and types of knowing

Given that this study intended to make a contribution to knowledge in the field, it seems appropriate to briefly consider what is meant by knowledge in a broad sense. Cardinal, Hayward & Jones (2004) suggest that philosophers have traditionally divided knowledge into three categories; practical knowledge, knowledge by acquaintance, and factual knowledge. Practical knowledge is knowing how to do something, that might be “independent of any ability to communicate it in language, or of having any conscious knowledge of precisely what one knows” (p.124). This category might include therapeutic skills that trainees use in practice, such as active

listening. Knowledge by acquaintance is that sense of knowing a person, place, or object by having met, been or had some experience of them, and similarly, this knowledge may be difficult to put into words. Empiricists regard “knowledge by acquaintance with our own sense data as the foundation of all empirical knowledge” (p.124). Finally, factual knowledge is knowing something to be the case, and this is often expressed in language and may include beliefs about things which may be true or false, for example, a trainee might say “I know that was countertransference”.

Cardinal, Hayward & Jones (2004) explore the definition of knowledge, specifically factual knowledge, as something that is believed, true, and justifiable based on external, objective evidence; traditionally described as ‘justified, true belief’. They question the extent to which we can distinguish between belief and knowledge, whether it is possible to set out criteria for evidence in this sense, and acknowledge that truth may also be difficult to define. Cayne & Loewenthal (2007) state:

The relationship between belief and knowledge can become confused with belief being mistaken for knowing further complicated by the problem of certain, taken for granted phenomena (such as motive) the truth of which depends on judgements made in unique situations (Heaton, 2004) (p.217).

Cardinal, Hayward & Jones conclude that a precise definition may not be possible but that the concept can be used without finding the necessary and sufficient conditions of its use.

The contribution to knowledge generated in undertaking this research, could be seen to attempt to straddle the gap between reason and perception as it tries to welcome both thought and feeling as sources of information. Alternatively, Weissmark & Giacomo (1998) discuss the differences between knowing-in-theory and knowing-in-practice for the psychologist, something acknowledged by practitioners and

researchers alike. They consider these two forms of knowing to be connected to two modes of cognitive functioning, and each mode provides a distinctive way of ordering experience. Knowing-in-theory is considered to be “explicit, learned and deliberate” (p.40), it is rational and associated with scientific analysis and generalizable knowledge, and is referred to as the ‘logical mode’ of thinking. In contrast, knowing-in-practice is “tacit, spontaneous and automatic” (p.40), it is intuitive and associated with interpretation, seeing human behaviour as unpredictable, and is referred to as the ‘analogical mode’ of thinking. The analogical mode does not require use of language to be consistent or non-contradictory, as does the logical mode. An important feature of analogical thinking is that it allows us to recognise similarity and likeness (analogy) and patterns between things, this ability to apply a relational structure from a familiar event to an unfamiliar event can help us make sense of the unfamiliar. The two modes of thinking are considered by Bruner (1986) to be complementary but irreducible to one another, that together they capture the rich diversity of thought. However each way of knowing has “operating principles of its own and its own criteria of well-formedness. They differ radically in their procedures for verification” (p.11). The logical mode tests for empirical truth, whereas the analogical mode is of a different order, describing and explaining, acknowledging our constant interactions with others but not (or rarely) predicting.

The researcher appreciates the value of both of the above-mentioned types of knowing, and recognises with certainty that the present study would not have been possible if she or the participants had drawn on logical thinking alone. Indeed, the research question, study design and research purpose requires that which only analogical thinking can offer. Similarly, in practice, the importance of the analogical is acknowledged as Weissmark & Giacomo (1998) report: “competent practitioners

exhibit a kind of knowing-in-practice that is unlike the kind of knowledge in manuals..." (p.44); and, "it is evident that theory-based knowledge does not describe or account for the clinical competence that practitioners sometimes reveal in what they do" (p.42). Furthermore, Weissman, Rounsaville & Chevron (1982) warn that the relationship with the client may suffer where this knowing-in-practice quality is absent or neglected "if the guidelines are followed in an overly rigid, 'cookbook' fashion, spontaneous development of a helping alliance can be undermined" (p.1444). Another issue, exists simply in the unwillingness of some to accept information as being valuable when it cannot be easily described or explained, as Freud himself experienced:

It was impossible for me to give medical readers the directions necessary to enable them to carry through the method of psychotherapy treatment...to many physicians, psychotherapy seems to be the offspring of modern mysticism and, compared with our physic-chemical specifics which are applied on the basis of physiological knowledge, psychotherapy appears quite unscientific and unworthy of the attention of a serious investigator (Freud, 1904/1959, p.250).

Hammersley (2009) notes that "crucial in the training of Counselling Psychologists [is] the ability to think not just to know" (p.7), that disseminating 'knowledge products' is not enough, and that "the clients already know, and we have to use our critical thinking informed by our theory to discern what it is they know". She emphasises the need involve "the person themselves and the ability to form relationships with people" and "intuition as a means to know" (p.7). Less accessible means of knowing is also something Schön's (1983) work on the reflective practitioner explores, with his suggestion that practitioners know more than they can describe. In summary, this look at knowledge and types of knowing indicates that there are few knowns regarding knowledge, and the different aspects of, or approaches to

understanding our knowledge have limitations when considered alone, and do not sit very comfortably in the company of the alternatives. In view of this, “any therapeutic encounter is necessarily typified by improvisations. Expert’s knowledge always is dynamic and promotes context-dependent understanding” (Weissmark & Giacomo, 1998, p.43).

### **5.5 The experience: emotional responses in practice**

This section of the chapter looks at the experience of interest in this study, emotional responses in practice. Whilst there are many theories about what emotional responses might mean in the context of clinical work (e.g. countertransference), theory will be explored independently in the next section of this chapter. Before reviewing literature and perspectives on emotional responses, a basic understanding of emotion is offered. An emotion can be described as a mental and physiological state associated with a variety of feelings, thoughts, and behaviour, and Ekman (1999) describes that “the primary function of emotion is to mobilize the organism to deal quickly with important interpersonal encounters, prepared to do so by what types of activity have been adaptive in the past” (p.46). Ekman’s description highlights three aspects of emotion here; first, that emotion is to do with movement - the word is based on Latin for ‘out’ ‘move’; second, that its function tends to be to do with relationships; and third, that a person’s past has some bearing on it. These features suggest that we might view emotions as more than just subjective experiences, experienced from an individual point of view. Of particular relevance to the present research is the relational quality of emotions as Rafaeli & Hareli (2008) explain:

Emotions are one of the main sources for the interaction. Emotions of an individual influence the emotions, thoughts and behaviours of others; others' reactions can then influence their future interactions with the individual

expressing the original emotion, as well as that individual's future emotions and behaviours. Emotion operates in cycles that can involve multiple people in a process of reciprocal influence (p.2).

During this study the researcher did not distinguish between emotions and feelings, but considered both important parts of the emotional response experience. Stanley and Wise (1983) indicate that “[e]motions, the product of the mind, can be separated, at least at the level of theoretical discussion, from feelings, rooted in the responses of the body; cold and pain are feelings, love and envy are emotions” (p.196), but they questioned how we could understand an emotional response without the feelings that generated it. Jaggar (1989) suggests that as well being connected to physiological responses (feelings), emotions include more conscious aspects, indicating that they are not easily separated from other human faculties like cognition. Similarly, Tallis (1998) notes that when defence mechanisms are operating, the quality of thinking suffers; “[a]ttitudes may become less flexible and ideas are sometimes expressed in a simplified form. Crude overgeneralisations will make more frequent appearances ... the individual begins to accept these summary judgements as facts” (p.117).

However, it is not accurate to say that emotions alone distort thinking, for where once they were considered disruptive to the higher-order cognitive functions, a more current view is that emotions are important in organising some behaviours and regulating social interactions, and have “the capacity to either enhance or undermine effective functioning” (Thompson, 1994, p.25). Greenberg & Paivio (1997) consider that “[e]motions move us and inform us and when they are integrated with reason, they make us wiser than we are when we use our intellects alone” (p.vii). This consideration about how emotion interacts with our feelings and cognitions is interesting, albeit inconclusive.

In reference to the importance of emotion in knowledge construction, Harris & Huntingdon (2001) note an absence of discussion around emotion and its impacts, effects and possible coping strategies. It could be that the stress and complexity that arises from working with emotional material has a hand in this absence, because the reality can be a “difficult and messy process” and one where repression is commonplace (p.134).

The advantages of capturing emotions as a source of information are reported by a number of authors, for example, Greenberg and Paivio (1997) remind us that emotions can be adaptive, they can serve interpersonal functions and may have a secondary gain, and “marshalling of emotions in the service of a goal is essential for paying attention, for self-motivation and mastery, and for creativity” (Goleman, 1995, p.43). Similarly, Harris & Huntingdon consider that acknowledging the emotional impact of events in practice enables us to “analyse reflexively the differences between the values and the experiences of the self and other”; to “evaluate our practice in far greater depth”; and to relive events “when analysing our practice or responding to research subjects” (p.131). There are also any number of practitioners who, like Yalom (2001), convey the value of using their own feelings as data in their work, and urge others to do the same (p.65).

Attachment theory and research is also relevant to emotional responses because of the nature of the mother-infant relationship in the formation of emotional understanding, expression and regulation. As Goldberg (2000) explains, “different attachment patterns are associated with experiences in which caregivers convey distinct messages about the rules for emotional expression and, as a result, correspondingly distinct styles of emotional regulation and expression develop” (p.139). Understanding this and how it relates to clinical practice is useful, for

example, if Bowlby's (1979) internal working models are in operation within the (adult) therapist and client, then it is helpful to understand that these models comprise conscious and unconscious, cognitive and affective information, that developed early in life and are subject to change as new experiences adjust their content and structures.

Some studies (Bretherton, 1990; Laible & Thompson, 1998) inform us about attachment in the relationship, specifically, the development of the ability to perceive, interpret and label accurately the expressed emotions of others, which are abilities used commonly in the work of the therapist with their client. Available evidence suggests that secure attachment can be associated with realistic perception and interpretation of the emotional experiences and expressions of others; and given that insecure attachment is associated with discrepancies between what is felt, expressed and discussed, it is predicted that insecure attachment can be associated with greater difficulty and confusion in interpreting and describing the emotional expressions of others (Goldberg, 2000, p.144). A reflexive point is made here, for, insecure attachment could be used to explain why the researcher or the trainees (where relevant) experienced particular difficulty with making sense of their emotional responses to clients, and while the researcher cannot speculate about the participants' attachment styles, she can consider it to be a possible explanation for her own experience.

There is some evidence that adults differ in the use of emotional vocabulary depending on their attachment status (p.146). Goldberg (2000) summarises that:

Secure individuals are more spontaneously expressive and more accurate in reading emotions than those in other attachment categories. Avoidant or dismissing individuals are minimally expressive, are observed to restrain expression of negative emotions, and appear to underestimate the intensity of negative emotions in others (p.149).



Data also suggests that those who are resistant or preoccupied in their attachment status experience more confusion in reading and expressing emotions, and that they express positive affect predominantly, even in response to negative signals. This group are also the most likely to label emotions with non-emotion words (Goldberg, Blockland, Cayetano & Benoit, 1998).

In order to understand individual differences in emotional responses to the same stimuli, investigations have been made into whether there are differences in how emotions are experienced physiologically, or whether difference is in the interpretation and report only. A number of studies suggest that physiological arousal such as heart rate, cortisol measurements (Hertsgaard et al, 1995; Spangler & Grossman, 1993), and galvanic skin responses (Dozier & Kobak, 1992) are similar across attachment types, therefore the differences are considered to be down to defensive processes (Bretherton, 1990; Case, 1995). These have been observed in cases where (often opposing) emotions inhibit each other, resulting in a need to reduce the conflict experienced instead of the original cause of the distress (Goldberg, 2000, p.147). Such processes will have become a form of emotion regulation, defined as, “extrinsic and intrinsic processes for monitoring, evaluating and modifying emotional reactions, especially their intensive and temporal features, to accomplish one’s goals” (Thompson, 1994, p.27). While there is not scope to explore it here, the researcher values related contributions to psychological and psychotherapeutic understandings of emotion made by research in the field of affective neuroscience, e.g. by Schore (2003) and Siegal (2003).

O’Brien (1994) suggests that emotions are usually analysed as individual artifacts or expressions of systemic relations but rarely both. Scollen, Howard, Caldwell & Ito (2009) bring together Affect Valuation Theory (Tsai, Knutson & Fung,

2006) which suggests that culture influences how people want to feel (ideal affect), with, the Time-sequential Framework of Subjective Well-being (Kim-Prieto, Diener, Tamir, Scollon & Diener, 2005), and proposed that cultural norms influenced the memory, but not the experience, of emotion. Scollen et al. put it to us that the memory of the experience may differ to the experience itself; which could be likened to the idea that an experience, when spoken about later, will be constructed differently (social constructionism). In addition to being methodologically informative, this idea highlights the importance of social influence because theory is often socially derived and may take the form of a cultural belief.

Tiedens & Leach (2004) write about the social life of emotions, discussing emotional responses as a form of mimicry and mirroring of the other person, and, a form of empathy, whereby there is a sharing of emotional states with another, and therefore one must negotiate the border between self and other. In Davis' (1994) view, emotional responses are responses of one individual to the experiences of another; and Davis' model of empathy related processes and outcomes offers clear categories that could be used for distinguishing between such experiences within a relationship. Within the model, Davis includes four affective outcomes: parallel emotion (reproduction in an observer of the targets feelings), reactive emotion (affective reactions to others experiences that differ to observed affect), empathic concern (compassion for target), and personal distress (discomfort and anxiety in response to needy targets) (p.21). Tiedens & Leach (2004) emphasised the social process of emotional responses in their discussion about the potential for 'merging', in it they put forward evidence to suggest that empathy could make the overlapping of the representation of self and other more likely.

Given that “emotional responses to - and about - other people seem especially critical in shaping social life” (Davis, 1994, p.37), it is unfortunate that studies such as that by Harris (1999) on incidence and impacts of psychotherapists' feelings toward their clients, which found that feelings such as fear, anger and attraction are commonly experienced by therapists toward their clients, also found that most psychotherapists felt inadequately trained to acknowledge and successfully manage such experiences. In summary, emotional responses are acknowledged as extremely important experiences in practice and research in the therapeutic field, however they are simultaneously absent in arenas where other forms of knowing, such as logic, dominate. Therefore, the researcher's impression is that their place in training and research is incomplete and not wholly accounted for.

## **5.6 Theory**

This final section of the literature review is dedicated to theory. Attention will first be given to acknowledging some of those theories that offer insight or explanation regarding emotional response experiences to clients in practice; the psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theory, countertransference, will be discussed, followed by alternative theoretical views from models including person-centred and cognitive behavioural, amongst others. After this, a broader discussion will include literature on multiple theories and theoretical integration, what practice and research use can reveal about theory, and a social perspective on theory, before closing with discussion around developing a theoretical orientation, and finally, generating theory.

### **5.6.1 Countertransference**

As anticipated, the expression ‘emotional responses to clients’ did evoke reference to the theory of ‘countertransference’, and as this theory was discussed by many of the trainees in making sense of their experiences, it receives separate attention.

Countertransference has a variety of definitions and subcategories (such as concordant, complementary, neurotic, illusory, syntonic, proactive, and reactive) but is ultimately a psychoanalytic concept understood to involve unconscious processes, in particular, the therapist’s internal response to a client’s ‘transferred’ relationship upon them (their transference). Alternatively, countertransference describes the impact of the client on the therapist (Spurling, 2004). Countertransference did not feature greatly in the literature until the 1950s and the concept “has undergone a considerable evolution” since Freud described it as a ‘blind spot’ thought to interfere with the psychoanalyst’s efficacy. Considered an interference, countertransference was thought to demand “purging through the requisite training analysis” (Cooper, 2006, p.411) to prevent the therapist’s unresolved object-relationships being re-enacted (Spurling, 2004, p.112). Both Racker (1957) and Heimann (1950) agreed that countertransference encompassed all of the feelings and psychological responses that the therapist experienced towards his or her patient, no longer restricting it, as did Freud to purely pathological components of the therapist's response. Heimann argued that “the analyst's countertransference [was] an instrument of research into the patient's unconscious” (p.81), and could be considered “one of the most important tools for [the therapist’s] work”. More recent perspectives on the concept emphasize its interference, its value, or both; for example, Wishnie (2005) sees the therapist’s inner reactions as “an essential and unavoidable aspect of psychoanalytic treatment” (Cooper, 2006, p.411).

Countertransference can be experienced in the form of a bodily sensation, a particular mood, or thoughts, feelings or fantasies about the client, it is “the way the client’s transference onto the counsellor resonates with him, allowing the counsellor to recognize the transference by the way it affects him” (Spurling, 2004, p.112). Spurling explains that clues to the presence of transference might be seen in the way a client conducts himself or herself, or, in a pattern of relating.

Heimann (1950) states that “[o]ur basic assumption is that the analyst’s unconscious understands that of his patient”, and she suggests countertransference feelings can be looked at against the patients associations and behaviour, as a “valuable means of checking whether [the therapist] has understood or failed to understand his patient” (p.75). While looking for this ‘fit’ sounds sensible, Spurling warns that “[t]his presupposes an ability on the counsellor’s part to discriminate between what has been projected into him by the client and what belongs to him” (p.115), which cannot be exact. To try to understand countertransference, the counsellor must find some resonance “from the counsellor’s own make-up” (p.116), however, given that we are all more aware of some experiences than others, we “are always to some extent groping in the dark” (Spurling, 2004, p.116).

Even Paula Heimann’s interpretation of her countertransference from her paper *On Countertransference* (1950) is questionable according to Livingston Smith (1999). He argued that Heimann disregarded her own vulnerability, which her patient may have unconsciously observed in her, and further, that her feeling of concern might have been one of her not wanting to acknowledge this (given her helping role in the their relationship). The point that is being made here is one about the mutuality of emotions in a relationship, which Racker illustrates when he says:

Just as countertransference is a ‘creation’ of the patient... and an integral part of his inner and outer world, so also, in some measure, is transference the analyst’s creation, and an integral part of his inner and outer world (1958, p.178).

The researcher considers that the strength of this theory is in opening its user to potential discovery of hidden meaning, that might be of great benefit if brought into awareness, whilst simultaneously, its weakness lies in the space for misinterpretation and error in trying to use it without sufficient awareness of self and self-other boundaries. As previously mentioned, ascertaining ‘what belongs to who’ in the therapeutic relationship with any accuracy is problematic for the therapist, especially the trainee. Lang (1976) highlights the therapists part in the issue, and states “little attention has been paid to the analyst’s own unconscious need to involve the patient in his own re-enactments, or to prompt the patient towards living out” (p.86), where ‘living out’ was a term for efforts at re-enactment. In agreement with Lang, Bonac (1999) expresses concern about “unrestrained transference interpretations” whereby “the analyst indiscriminately... blames the patient for acting out” (p.74). Evidence for such a concern can be taken from Azim et al.’s (1992) clinical research study investigating the accuracy and dosage of transference interpretations. Findings showed an inverse association between high transference interpretations, and the quality of the therapeutic alliance and the outcome of therapy for neurotic patients; suggesting that there might be something harmful in the way transference interpretations are applied.

Livingston Smith recommends using Trombi’s (1987) term ‘patient’s countertransference’ to refer to the patient’s unconscious response to the analyst’s emotional engagements with them, suggesting that it would be “absurd” to remain with a unilateral notion of unconscious communication in the psychoanalytic situation. The researcher agrees that ‘unilateral’ thinking is cause for concern, and encourages

debate about what the theories used to make sense of these experiences might encourage us to see or not see, and to do or not do.

When new therapists are confronted by strong feelings in clinical practice it is an enormous challenge for them and the temptation may be to push the feelings or emotions away. Heimann (1950) states “[i]f an analyst tries to work without consulting his feelings, his interpretations are poor. I have often seen this in the work of beginners, who, out of fear, ignored or stifled their feelings” (1950, p.73). Spurling (2004) suggests that new therapists resort to their intellect in order to protect themselves against the emotional impact of the work with the patient, a description that resonates with the researcher’s early experience in practice. Spurling also suggests that new therapists try to discharge and get rid of the feelings that arise in them, or suppress them.

By way of working with these difficulties, Ferenczi (1933/1949) suggested that patients could provide instructive information to the analyst about how the analyst is experienced in the therapeutic relationship, urging fellow psychoanalysts to look for the existence of “repressed or suppressed criticism of us” (p.226) in the unconscious associations of patients. Ferenczi’s direct reference to the relationship between patient and analyst received some criticism at that time, but later, around the time of Heimann’s work, Little (1951) writes:

We often hear of the mirror which the analyst holds up to the patient, but the patient holds one up to the analyst too, and there is a whole series of reflections in each, repetitive in kind and subject to continual modification. The mirror in each case should become progressively clearer as the analysis goes on, for patient and analyst respond to each other in a reverberative kind of way, and increasing clearness in one mirror will bring the need for a corresponding clearing in the other (p.43).

Green (1972) also offers a helpful description of the co-construction that is thought to occur with the transference process; Green suggested a ‘double’ of the counsellor can be created as a result of the client’s transference together with the counsellor’s tendency to adopt certain roles or take on particular projections. Whereas the client may view this transference figure as the counsellor, the counsellor needs to work to de-construct the jointly created figure and help the client see their part in its creation.

Finally, previous research associated with emotional responses to clients included a variety of countertransference-related studies focussing on areas such as the risks of countertransference, adequate conceptualization of types of the transference process, and accountability for countertransference in practice. Some studies highlighted different types of countertransference, theoretical perspective, or studied countertransference in the supervisor. Of the countertransference studies that focussed on the trainee, emphasis was placed on countertransference as a critical issue for student counsellors, the importance of self-care through supervision and personal therapy to minimize one’s blind spots, and the use of countertransference perceptiveness to improve practice effectiveness and increased empathy. These studies were helpful indicators about what had been found to date, with those on personal development perhaps being the most informative; however, all of this research was undertaken within the constraints of this particular theoretical perspective, so are of limited relevance to the wider focus central to this investigation.

### **5.6.2 Other therapeutic approaches’ views about emotional responses**

This subsection outlines views about trainee therapist’s emotional responses in practice from authors identifying themselves as being from orientations including cognitive behavioural, person-centred, integrative, social and evolutionary and



existential. From a cognitive behavioural perspective, Evans (2007) acknowledges “there is sometimes a perception that there is no place in CBT for consideration of the dynamics of the therapeutic relationship” (p.116), even though Beck et al. (1979) have been said to have discussed the impact of transference and countertransference in CBT. Evans explains that in recent years, the term ‘interpersonal process issues’ has been used to describe the patient’s reactions to the therapy and therapist, as well as the therapist’s reactions to therapy and the patient, in the context of CBT (Safran & Segal, 1996). Consequently, Evans accepts that “process issues are particularly relevant when they block progress in therapy” (p.116).

In terms of the humanistic, specifically person-centred, tradition, Rogers (1951) states “transference *attitudes* exist in varying degrees in a considerable portion of cases handled by client-centred therapists.... It is in what happened to them that the difference arises” (p.200). Rogers goes on to describe that in few cases of client-centred therapy does the dependent transference relationship develop that Freud described. He illustrates that the therapist’s attitudes towards the client do not allow the client to attach or project negative feelings onto the therapist and the therapist encourages the client to understand and accept their feelings, then they are able to claim them as their own feelings about themselves (e.g. the therapist is not judging the client, the client is judging the client). Rogers describes the therapist’s role “as an evaluating, reacting person with need of his own – is so clearly absent” that the relationship is experienced by the client as a “one-way affair”, where the therapist is “being depersonalised for purposes of therapy into being ‘the client’s other self”” (p.208). Rogers is suggesting that when the client can meet themselves in this way, their “experiences are organized into a meaningful relation to the self...” whereby “the transferences attitudes disappear” (p.210). Rogers suggests that transference

relationships may be most likely to occur when the client perceives another as having “a more effective understanding of the self than he himself possesses” (p.218).

In more recent years, person-centred practitioners such as Gelso & Hayes (2007) have suggested that most of the therapist’s thoughts and feelings are considered to be realistic, but they add to this their experience, in clinical practice:

The person-centred ideal of congruence calls for therapists to behave in a manner that is consistent with their feelings. Clinical wisdom, however, would suggest otherwise when strong countertransference feelings are present. One of the key things to countertransference management is impulse-control: maintaining the recognition that feelings are temporary, do not need to be acted upon, and may co-exist with other feelings that are obscured in the moment (p. 65).

Finally, a different albeit relevant observation is made by Brodley (n.d.) who objects to the psychoanalytic use of language, considering it to be “careless” and about “status”, and adding that terms like ‘countertransference’ were experienced by some humanistic practitioners as “obfuscating”.

Moving now to the views of integrative authors, Evan & Gilbert (2005) speak of the value of emotional responses and countertransference, describing it as “inevitable, indispensable and invaluable information about the process of therapy” (p.135). Going beyond affirming their importance, some integrative practitioners emphasise that emotional responses are key to the efficacy of the therapy as a whole. Clarkson (2003) writes, “[c]learly, the nature and vicissitudes of the clinician’s own feelings, thoughts and images (the countertransference) are inextricably interwoven with the management of the transference relationship, and efficacy of the psychotherapy may well be determined by it” (p. 12). In line with this, a quantitative research study by Hayes, Riker and Ingram (1997) found that countertransference was not successfully managed in cases with poor to moderate treatment results and that the

adverse effect on treatment results was proportionate to the amount of countertransference exhibited. They also suggested that in successful counselling, countertransference could be managed in such a way that the overall amount present is unrelated to treatment results.

A very different perspective is put forward using a social and evolutionary approach to understanding emotional responses. Langs (1992) suggests that humans have evolved to be able to unconsciously exploit others, or cheat, for successful survival. Langs suggests that our brains have developed particular functions that work largely unconsciously, allowing us to manage extremely complex levels of social interaction. Such social complexities may be beyond what we would be able to manage consciously, furthermore, by being unconscious this is understood to reduce any inner moral conflict and better our chances of survival success. If human social interactions are like games with ground rules, it is believed that humans have developed some unconscious recognition of breaking these ground rules or cheating, and this will be expressed using unconscious communication. In the therapeutic situation however the unconscious social norms may work a little differently because there is an asymmetry in the relationship, the patient most likely has more at risk than the therapist and so will be monitoring the therapist to see how they follow, or set, the ground rules for the therapy. In addition, “analysts are called on to sustain an exquisite alertness to self-deception and avoidance of deception...” (Slavin & Kriegman, 1992, p.234) and are therefore required to become more conscious of what is usually an unconscious function in human social interaction, which Livingston Smith (1999) considers “deeply antagonistic to our evolved propensity for deceptive and self-serving social engagements” and “our evolved talent for remaining unaware of our own exploitativeness” (p.32). This perspective raises questions about whether human nature

is compatible with the therapeutic position, but it also challenges therapists to familiarise themselves with what might be an innate propensity in themselves and others.

Finally, an existential contribution from van Deurzen (1998) that is equally concerned with the big questions of survival but is more focussed on acceptance of the human condition, sees her write about the “constant tension between opposites” such as joy and sorrow, and how exposure to life’s contradictions “generates emotions that can easily swing us out of control” (p.1). In the face of such turbulence, van Deurzen acknowledges that “the aim of education and psychotherapy is often to help individuals achieve a feeling of security and confidence”. For her in her practice this meant “abandoning any remaining illusion of finding guidance in established theories, methods or individuals, [which] freed me to trust myself at last” (p.141).

### 5.6.3 Multiple theories and theoretical integration

As counselling psychologists become familiar with a number of different theories from different therapeutic orientations, learning how to select and or integrate theory(s) becomes necessary in order to find the best fit for individual clients and their concerns. By holding a number theories in mind there becomes many possible ways to think about the client and their circumstances, which can be both advantageous and challenging and confusing. However, it might also give rise to consideration about ‘truth’, a point on which van Deurzen (1998) cautions therapists:

As a reaction to the growing awareness amongst professionals that particular accounts of reality are in fact biased and sometimes possibly harmful and abusive, there is a growing movement to integrate theories into a more palatable generic overall therapeutic model. The movement for a more scientific or integrative approach to the subject could be seen as an attempt to

strive for the one single Truth that will explain all our difficulties and provide us with the facts of life (p.132).

Instead of expressing a desire for one truth, the counselling psychology trainee, to varying degrees, might demonstrate philosophical thinking and questioning, an ability to critically analyse, and a willingness to accept the idea that there is not just one truth regarding their dilemma or explanation of their experience. Such a position is not made easier by the apparent separateness of the mainstream theoretical models, as Evans & Gilbert (2005) suggest, it is “abundantly clear that the ‘many’ schools of psychotherapy exist in relative isolation from each other with regard to access to and interest in ‘rival’ theories” (p.9).

If applying one theory has an impact on the way a trainee understands their experience, then one might imagine theoretical integration and integrative psychotherapy would work to either lessen that impact or further complicate it. Gilbert & Orlans (2011) explain their integrative position, saying that they consider that successful psychotherapy goes beyond any simplistic use of a set of competencies, and does not take a reductionist position by favouring one modality over others. They suggest integrative psychotherapy is about having “a ‘cross-modality’ focus based in a reflexive approach to therapeutic work, and promoting a form of psychotherapy that will always be contextually informed by the person of the therapist, the person of the client, and the broader social frame in which problems are presented” (p.3). Therefore those practising integrative psychotherapy, as described, may be less likely to experience unhelpful impacts of theory (see discussion of findings) owing to a greater focus on relationship, process and context.

Gilbert & Orlans (2011) comment that in these changing political and social times there is in many ways a pull back towards schoolism (as conveyed by UK

government agenda). In contrast, recent American research by Lampropoulos & Dixon (2007) emphasises a positive attitude toward psychotherapy integration. Ultimately, use of psychotherapeutic theory, for research or clinical application, is best done with consideration given to the context and with some flexibility of thinking, as Jordan (2009) indicates, “I believe it pays to be ecumenical and not fundamentalist, inclusive and not schoolist” (p.11).

#### 5.6.4 What practice and research use reveal about theory

While there might be a dearth of existing research on the relationship between theory and experience, informative comparisons can be made from studies about theory and experience in practice, and also about a therapist's research use in practice.

Research by Argyris & Schon (1978) on the way theory is used in clinical practice, suggests that practitioner's theory-in-action is likely to be unknown to them and so differs to their known, espoused theories. The present study's focus has been on theory in the making sense process of an experience in practice, so might capture something of both of these relationships with theories. This study also sits on the periphery of research about learning and the development of knowledge, as seen in the reflective practice models by Kolb (1984), Gibbs (1988), Johns (1995) and Rolfe, Freshwater & Jasper (2001).

Relevant to this discussion, is when theory is used in practice, and Cohen, Sargent & Sechrest's (1986) paper on clinicians' use of psychotherapy research offers an informative comparison between use of theory and use of research. In their work, Cohen et al. found that "a narrow focus on instrumental use will make only a limited contribution to our understanding of the research-practice relationship in mental health" and for this reason "empirical studies of research use should employ multiple measures of utilization (e.g. awareness, consideration, instrumental, and conceptual use)" (p.205). This applies also to use of theory in relation to emotional responses in practice, and will be considered in the next chapter. Cohen, Sargent & Sechrest also found that psychologists' ratings of the usefulness of various information sources, revealed that theory was rated the third most useful after learning interactions with other people (discussions with colleagues, and workshops), and before research as an

information source. A common view held by psychologists and psychotherapists is that research is not relevant enough to be applicable to clinical practice (Cohen, Sargent & Sechrest, 1986; Morrow-Bradley & Elliott, 1986); so, might theories also ignore the complex realities of the therapy situation in this way?

Cohen et al. suggest that clinician's characteristics may have main and interactional effects on psychotherapy research use, and aside from their choice of theoretical orientation (to be discussed), age and length of experience were potential predictive factors. In particular, the least likely to consume research were very junior, because they rely heavily on supervision, and very senior practitioners, because of their heavy reliance on prior experience; this trend might also be seen in the use of theory. Cohen et al. also note that very little information on the process of clinical decision-making and the roles played by various sources of information (supervision, consultation, prior experience, etc.) in that process is available. In much the same way that Cohen et al. believe that research should be used to ensure a more data-based, scientifically informed, professional activity, so too do some psychologists express concern when theory is not being used in practice, should this result in ineffective, directionless or even harmful work between therapist and client.

Some argue that the psychologist's role as both a clinician and a researcher (where the researcher conceives and the clinician executes) is unworkable. Fensterheim & Raw (1996) argue that practice and research are independent fields with their own problems and styles of thinking, so make a plea for their disintegration. Barlow (1981) agreed that practical and philosophical differences between the fields made it impossible for clinicians to do research and make research findings relevant to practice, arguing against limitations in traditional research strategies, rather than inadequate training. In contrast, many years earlier, Rogers (1951) suggested that



researcher's knowledge of research design, scientific methodology and psychological theory made a valuable contribution to psychotherapy practice because they had the tools for discovering new truths, allowing outdated doctrines to be relinquished.

Rogers notes "[i]t has been very noticeable in certain individuals and professional groups that outworn therapeutic dogmas are not given up. One of the reasons appears to be the lack of security as to what will take their place" (p.439). Rogers' observation demonstrates that practitioner's theoretical approach is very meaningful to them, and that theory has a purpose of providing a secure and knowable experience in practice, which might otherwise be uncertain and anxiety provoking.

#### **5.6.5 A social perspective of theory**

The researcher acknowledged in the section of this chapter addressing emotional responses that they are an important source of information in our interaction with others. Similarly, one might view our theories about them as a way of uniting with others in our understanding and sharing helpful knowledge. But little so far has been included on whether theory has a social role or function that has more negative connotations, that is, whether the use of theory might foster issues that go overlooked, unnamed or are challenging to address in the therapeutic dyad, such as power and control. Attenborough, Hawkins, O'Driscoll & Proctor (2000) write of these impacts of theory, and make a plea to counselling psychologists and other mental health professionals "to reflect on their practice, and appreciate the ways in which their theories as well as their research, therapies, professional position, and their beliefs, values and stereotypes could be unwittingly, perhaps, contributing to the perpetuation of power inequalities" (p.14).

Shapiro & Astin (1998) discuss theory being used as a means of social control in the practice of psychological therapy and psychotherapy, and suggest that controlling the client is present in all of the mainstream therapeutic modalities (psychodynamic, humanistic, cognitive behavioural). They explain that psychotherapy talk has been specifically referred to as ‘social control’ defining this as “a process to influence an individual through social interaction toward some desired state” (p.134). The way in which such talk controls people, they claim, is through the social context where it occurs, and where the talk itself is constrained, for example in the therapeutic setting “clients tend to come to understand that the use of self-reference, present tense and meta-communication are highly valued, whereas indefinite pronouns and abstract words are unacceptable” (p.134), examples of this are given by Kilbourne and Richardson (1984).

Shapiro & Astin (1998) argue that it is important for therapists to acknowledge their negative manipulation through coercion and deception “we are constantly trying to influence our clients – by our nods, by what we reinforce, by what we don’t comment on” (p.136). They suggest we need to openly and honestly acknowledge to ourselves (and where appropriate our clients) our intent. There is also a wider impact of this in society, where knowledge can be ignored, suppressed or promoted to meet particular agendas (Foucault, 1972; Plummer, 1995), therefore Harris and Huntingdon (2001) argue for an awareness of the extent to which our personal commitment to specific ideological or political agendas influences our judgements about the legitimacy of specific accounts of phenomena (p.132).

#### **5.6.6 Developing a theoretical orientation**

While this study was not about developing a theoretical orientation, which to some extent will involve thinking and being within the constraints of theory, the research in this area shares features with the present study (that will be discussed in the following chapter).

A number of studies suggest that preferences for theoretical orientation can be predicted and influenced by factors including personality (Ogunfowora & Drapeau, 2008); personal philosophy or values, and philosophical assumptions (Murdoch, Banta, Stromseth & Brown, 1998); and by family, culture and personal characteristics (Castonguay, 2006; Norcross, 2006, Watson, 2006). Further influences of theoretical development include supervisors and mentors (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987); the theoretical emphases and culture of the training programmes (Cassin, Singer, Dobson & Altmaier, 2007), and personal therapy (Bitar, Bean & Burmudez, 2007). Research by Bitar, Bean & Burmudez (2007) suggested that mastery of trainee's theory came with professional development, and professional practice provided an opportunity to evaluate its effectiveness.

Research highly relevant to the present study by Fitzpatrick, Kovalak & Weaver (2010) investigated how trainees develop their theories of practice. Their findings resulted in the Process Model of Tentative Identifications, a model outlining the way personal theory develops through tentative identifications with particular theories, as well as the interaction of factors including reading, personal philosophy, practice and supervision in producing these identifications. Direct personal influences leading to identifications were "reading and practice, along with professional philosophies, aspirations and reflections" and indirect influences were "interactions with professors and supervisors, with other trainees, and with clients" (p.95). These studies offering predictors and influences of preferred theoretical orientation, do not

just apply to purist therapists/practitioners of one orientation, but also to eclectic psychologists who can be further categorized along theoretical and philosophical variables (Garfield & Kurtz, 1977).

With reference to therapist's attachment to their theoretical models, Cohen, Sargent & Sechrest's (1986) survey revealed that psychologists stated that it would be difficult for them to provide a treatment modality that was not consistent with their clinical style and personality, even a modality that had been shown by research to be effective. They note that given the personal meaning attached to being psychodynamic or behavioural, it is unlikely that a positively evaluated psychotherapy will be readily adopted if it is inconsistent with the clinician's theoretical (and often personal) identity. More recently, Arthur (2000) notes how attached the psychologists were to the model that they practiced with, referring to this as their 'world view'. Arthur indicated that both psychoanalytic or psychodynamic therapists and cognitive behavioural therapists showed tendencies of holding to their theoretical orientations even in the face of new information.

Trainees can develop theoretical ideas from their relationships with their peers, tutors, clients, supervisors and also others outside such as family and friends (Alred, 2006), and learning from others has been found to be preferred by the learner to learning in other ways (Casebow, 2010; Cohen, Sargent & Sechrest, 1986). Morrow-Bradley & Elliott's (1986) survey demonstrated that psychologists considered most of their learning to come from their experience with clients, indeed, Attenborough et al. (2000) suggests that client and service-user involvement would improve the content and delivery of counselling psychology training, because service users are the real experts in their situation (Tait & Lester, 2005; Hayward et al., 2005).

In addition to the important social and relational influences to a trainee's development of their theoretical orientation, how this development takes place is noteworthy. Alred (2006) emphasizes the importance of "learning to learn in new ways, and integrating learning from different sources and activities to arrive at secure understanding" (p.287). Alred further describes the challenging process of learning where it is expected that the trainee therapist will go:

Round and round learning layers, connecting and fusing them into holistic understanding and the competence to practice, encountering uncertainty, paradox and contradiction along the way. Cherished beliefs, unquestioned perceptions, stubborn preconceptions and undreamt of blindspots become grist for the mill (p.286).

Time is needed for such a process, and as suggested, it is not linear in the way this takes place. Norcross & Beutler (2000) suggest that the development of a theoretical orientation for a practitioner is a complex process that takes considerable time and clinical experience. Rogers (1951) believed that theory must follow experience in order to be helpful to the practitioner, he explains:

To train a student, prematurely, in a theory of personality, or even in a variety of such theories, results all too often in a dogmatic and closed-minded approach to experience. This is as true of a theory developed from a client-centered approach as of theory developed from any other orientation....To the person with therapeutic experience it may be constructive, since it offers him a formulation which he can test against his own experience and revise or discard accordingly. But the uninitiated student ... it may all too readily be interpreted as the truth, or as dogma – a rigid vessel into which one must be warped, even if it does not fit. It is for such reasons as these that no special stress had been placed on theory of personality as an element in the student's preparation for training in therapy (p.440).

### 5.6.7 Generating theory

Finally, this part of the chapter closes the discussion on theory by acknowledging something of what it is to generate one's own theory. Malan (1995) explains that "one of the most hopeful developments in the whole field is the growing tendency to break away from rigid and compartmentalized systems, practised with religious fervour, to the adoption and integration of what seems to be the most effective elements in each" (p.284). Malan suggests that therapists should be encouraged to find effective methods of practice that suits their own personalities. A similar suggestion of building a theory for practice to fit with the therapist's personal style and philosophy is given by Blocksma & Porter (1947) who, referring to psychotherapy training, suggested that "a more efficacious method might be to spend considerable time and effort at the outset getting each trainee to know how he 'naturally' counsels clients" (Rogers, 1951, p.459). Blocksma & Porter suggest that by having a picture of one's own methods, attitudes and empirical counselling philosophy, trainees can compare theirs to others and better decide how they want to change their methods.

In developing a new theory or approach to practice, having the opportunity to share and compare one's ideas with others is of huge value to the theorist, who can make constructive use of the diversity of perspectives in refining and testing their ideas. However, the alternative view of this is that being flooded with information from existing theories and from other people may be unavoidable, and may not allow the theorist the space that they need to immerse themselves unbiased in the area of interest. Locke (2007) states "a central appeal of the grounded theory approach to many researchers is its implied promise that we will be able to develop theory from our engagement with the research setting, free from the dictates and the constraints of prior theoretical formulations" (p.565). This freedom from theoretical formulations, as much as is realistically possible, was of particular benefit given the present study

focus, and in the researcher's experience it was both at times inspiring and overwhelming to be 'alone with the participant data' for the most part of the research process, prior to the literature review. Consequently, the researcher must embrace her/his part in the research, acknowledging that "theorizing takes place within the confines and reach of an embodied researcher. As such, we are the primary instrument for conceptualizing and generating theory from our engagement with the lives and worlds of those we study" (Locke 2007, p.566).

In conclusion, generating a theory requires data, the theorist's awareness of their impact and influences on those factors around which the theory is based, and thorough exploration of related research and literature, as this chapter tries to demonstrate. In this case it involved a willingness to accept a process full of ambiguity and uncertainty, for which Locke (2007) believes the "embodied operation of dual modes of thinking" characterized as "the rational, controlled, and the irrational, free-playing modes" (p.566) are necessary thinking processes for grounded theory researchers, who must acknowledge the contradictory demands of staying close to the data, and interpreting and theorizing imaginatively (Locke, 2001).

## CHAPTER SIX

### Discussion

#### 6.1 Discussion outline

In this final chapter the researcher will review the study, discuss her reflections on the research findings and process, and emphasize difficulties, queries and limitations throughout. Following the summary of the findings, areas that are discussed include the concept for the research, choice of methodology and method, sample and validity considerations, reflexivity, and the review of the literature. Implications of the findings are considered for counselling psychology practice and training, before the chapter is brought to a close with suggestions for future research and concluding thoughts.

#### 6.2 Summary of findings

This study explored the impact of theory on the way trainee counselling psychologists made sense of their experiences of having emotional responses towards their clients in practice, and these findings are offered as one possible explanation of the data.

A grounded theory, constructed with participants interview data, showed that a total of eight categories were constructed from the data. The researcher found it helpful to subdivide these categories into the overarching or core category; four ‘impact’ categories, describing the different impacts of theory on the way trainees made sense of their emotional response experiences; two ‘influence’ categories, describing the key influences thought to indicate which, and to what extent, trainees experienced the impact(s); and an ‘experience’ category that describes something about why theory is



needed and useful with this particular type of experience in practice. All categories, but in particular the ‘influence’ categories, were important in the composition of the core category *the trainee’s relationship with theory*. The conceptualisation of this core category was considered an “explication of a process” (Charmaz, 2006, p.113).

The researcher offers *the trainee’s relationship with theory* as a more contextual, process-orientated lens through which to consider the impact of theory on the way trainees make sense of their experience, this is important because theory exists in the mind and actions of a person, who themselves exists within a social context. Therefore the core category captures more fully the way that theory is i) interpreted by trainees in accordance with their own unique set of experiences, and, ii) the way that it is integrated into the trainee’s system of experience, rather than being picked up, made use of and then put down again. *The trainee’s relationship with theory* can be better understood by its three properties, which inform and develop its processes for the trainee to apply (depending on the circumstances) in practice. The properties are *the trainee’s philosophical perspectives and theoretical knowledge*, *the trainee’s self-awareness and personal development*, and, *social aspects and influences affecting the trainee*.

### 6.2.1 The ‘impact’ categories

The first and second impact categories, *theory reveals the trainee’s experience* and *theory conceals the trainee’s experience*, took their names from the Heideggerian idea about simultaneous concealment and unconcealment of reality. Before this idea could be accepted and integrated into the research, the researcher applied caution and revisited the data to check that this construction was indeed grounded in the data, which it showed to be. The properties, *the trainee uses theory to make meaning from*

*their experience, theory informs the trainee what to do with their experience, and theory provides the trainee with a name for their experience;* also saw the researcher review the data for other possibilities, after observing that she herself had experienced these advantages from applying theory to her experience. These issues are not raised to undermine the grounded theory categories, but to acknowledge that the researcher's influence should not go unnoticed because her participation in the interview process, and interpretations made throughout the data analysis, were *part of* the data from which this co-constructed theory was grounded.

The category *theory raises uncertainty in the trainee* featured strongly in the data, with its properties, *the trainee's experience of conflicting theories or proponents of theory, the trainee's position that theory is meaningless until it is experienced in practice, and, the trainee's concern with issues of ownership or entanglement of emotional material in practice.* This may be because these areas have clear connections with the influence categories and *the trainee's relationship with theory.* It may also be because the process of having a relationship with theory actually requires some uncertainty, so that there is room in which to move and adjust as the trainee, and their clients, settings, contexts and length in practice, change over time.

The category *theory conceals the trainee's experience,* and its properties *the trainee's use of theory replaces their experience, the trainee disregards alternative meanings for their experience, and, criticisms the trainee makes about theory,* were challenging to develop. This was partly because working with something with a nature of being concealing meant that the researcher was unsure about whether she was able to see this in the data sufficiently, and also, because it seemed to act as a bridge between trainee's reports of ways that theory was not revealing or helpful, and, using theory in such a way as to almost be unaware it was anything other than their

experience they were describing. The latter description moves in the direction of not being aware of theory, as addressed by the final impact category.

*The trainee's inability to perceive the impact of theory, with its properties, the trainee finds theory inseparable from their making-sense process, the trainee's difficulty thinking about theory and their experience at the same time, and, the trainee has limited awareness about when they are using theory,* were amongst the most difficult themes to analyse and develop, as codes were derived mostly from actions and processes as opposed to spoken content. The researcher also found this difficult because she had not fully appreciated that this investigation might be difficult to speak about, or that it might require the trainee to access something in themselves or their experience that, to varying degrees, was out of their awareness. Consequently, constructing this category was perhaps the most informative of all the impacts of theory.

### 6.2.2 The 'influence' categories

These categories respond to the research question differently, not by naming impacts but by naming those factors that affect the impacts experienced by the trainee. These themes competed with the 'impact' data for the researcher's attention, and became something integral to the resulting grounded theory. The 'influence' themes and what became the 'influence' categories began to take shape early on in the study, and were building with each new participant's contribution. It seemed clear that something about the trainee's identity was important, while they developed personally and professionally, and as significant learning from social influences and interactions were acknowledged. Although, faced with so much data, the researcher had some concerns that she might leave something meaningful out. Eventually, the following organisation

could be accepted: *the trainee's personal and professional development* category, with properties of *it takes time for the trainee to incorporate theory into their practice*, *the trainee learns to trust their own experience*, and, *the trainee's grasp of the counselling psychology ethos*; and *the nature of the trainee's relationships* category, with properties of *the trainee's relationship with their role models*, *the trainee's relationship with their client*, and, *the trainee's relationship with their family of origin*.

The two categories are expansive areas, and there is much diversity within them as their properties vary dimensionally (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The six category properties (three per category) are not mutually exclusive and each have the ability to affect the other properties if they change. Such movement is almost certain as a trainee develops during the course of their training.

What might be considered a limitation of these two categories is the overlap in content that exists between them and the core category. This is likely to have occurred in part because the influence category themes are so central to the composition of *the trainee's relationship with theory*. However, the researcher also considers that this might have been a demonstration of her relationship with theory in action (see reflexivity), because her understanding of this took time to unfold, and did so in a layered, non-linear way.

### 6.2.3 The 'experience' category

The themes for this category centre on and around the experience of having emotional responses in practice. Like the 'influence' categories, it can also be seen to answer the research question differently, because it does not describe an impact like the 'impact' categories, or something that influences the trainee and their relationship with theory in the way that the 'influence' categories do. Instead, this category's themes are about

why we use or need theory when experiencing emotional responses to clients in practice. These themes were not accounted for elsewhere, but naturally contribute to what constitutes a trainee's relationship with theory. The researcher recalls having paid less attention to this category earlier on during the analysis because she had believed it was originating from data relating to emotional responses only and therefore was not providing information about theory, however, becoming aware of such biases was a necessary part of the work and this was done sufficiently to ensure it was included as a category.

### **6.3 Concept for the research**

It occurred to the researcher that the contribution of this research to counselling psychology knowledge might be debatable if one considered there to be a problem with undertaking research with an epistemological focus, where the ontological position was unknown, or an assumed position had not been stated. The researcher began this research with two somewhat separate interests that each occupied different branches of philosophical study. The first interest was the experience of emotional responses in the therapeutic relationship, which might be best considered ontological in nature; and the second concerned the theories with which we make sense and meaning of the world, which was relevant to epistemology. Studying the inter-relationship between these two areas was of the greatest appeal, and warranted inviting the participants to speak of both these areas. Including both interests however risked overwhelming the researcher with data, so for practical necessity, the researcher chose to focus more on just one of these areas and gave priority to theory. Despite doing this, the research remained relatively complex and the researcher was somewhat pestered with the sense that there was a divide of focus.

However, during the course of the study, the ‘problem’ of separate areas of focus and uncertainty that were previously a concern, transformed with the researcher’s understanding of her findings. In returning to the earlier question of whether the nature of being needs to be addressed before the nature of knowing can be studied, the researcher considers this to be of minimal relevance because one’s ways of knowing will ultimately affect one’s understanding of being, therefore, this research on having a relationship with theory makes a contribution about being with one’s knowing, and in this way adds a little to both epistemology and ontology in the counselling psychology field.

#### **6.4 Sample**

As the participants for this study responded to advertisements, it is likely that those who were attracted to the study had an interest in discussing their emotional responses in practice. Although ‘making sense’ was on the advertisement, the word ‘theory’ was avoided in order to explore its impact in the making sense process. The researcher considers it possible that different participants, such as those who would be less attracted to the idea of discussing emotional responses, or, those who would sooner opt to speak about theory if asked, might have different relationships with theory, and different elements of this process might have been seen if the researcher had recruited differently. This said, the participants of this research provided a rich diversity of experiences and opinions during interview, particularly different were those from integrative programmes (who appeared more relational, and less theoretically-focussed) in comparison with those programmes in which models were taught separately.

Whilst theoretical sampling was employed in order to better develop the theory, the strategy was not used to its full potential due to practical recruitment issues. Specifically, the clustered timings of a number of the participant interviews reduced the time available for analysis between participants. Overall, this study did not aim to produce generalizable findings, however Willig (2008) suggests that if an experience occurs it may well be replicable to some extent. In this respect, a larger and more diverse sample could strengthen the findings, and a greater focus on theoretical sampling might have refined what was found.

### **6.5 Methodology and method**

Just as Heidegger's (1943/1998) notion of simultaneously revealing and concealing reality highlights that there are limitations to any given perspective, the researcher was conscious of the way that constructivist grounded theory too would shed light on some areas (e.g. social processes) while casting shadow over others (e.g. attention to language). Ultimately, this methodology's advantages outweighed its disadvantages; it was fit for purpose e.g. the "strongest case for use of grounded theory is in investigations of relatively uncharted waters..." (Stern, 1995, p.30); its epistemological stance was interpretative, evolving, and in keeping with counselling psychology; and practically, the constant comparative method helped to manage the large quantity of data.

There were several challenges with using this methodology. Firstly, its use meant that the researcher was essentially constructing a theory about the impact of theory, which, it could be argued, might impede or contradict the exploratory purpose of the research. However, the findings were considered interpretative and more of an explication of process than a theory, and, in addition to this, constructing a theory (of sorts) presented an opportunity to better understand the nature of theory and one's

relationship with it. Part of such an understanding, came with acknowledging the possibility that the study findings could be applied to the grounded theory constructed, therefore, the impact of considering oneself to have a relationship with theory could reveal, conceal, create uncertainty or be out of one's awareness with regards to the way one makes sense of their experience.

A second challenge concerned the research paradigm from which this approach came (social constructionism, symbolic interactionism) which fit with this study content, however it was new to the researcher and so did not correspond with some of the thinking on which the research concept was originally built (phenomenology, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis), giving the researcher more to assimilate and learn about.

A third challenge was one of acknowledging and accepting the limitations of data collection and analysis. As the present study indicates, there are different ways that theory can impact a trainee, and these impacts are likely to be present in forms captured by the study methodology, as well as forms not captured by it. For example for the present study, during the interviews, information visible in the body language, gestures and facial expressions of participants (often emotional information) were not verbalised and so were not included on the recordings or the interview transcripts. Similarly, during the data analysis, experiences that were verbalised by participants could easily lose their context and their meaning when the sentences were literally broken up by the coding process.

Overall, the researcher found putting the process of simultaneous data collection and analysis into practice as time-consuming, and at times it could be confusing, frustrating and exhausting. Learning the new methods, handling large quantities of data at varying levels of analysis, and estimating timings for the



management of the different aspects of the research, presented many challenges that created uncertainty and anxiety in the researcher. Interestingly, just as utilizing a theory might *relieve the impact of the trainee's experience* in clinical practice, relief came to the researcher as the grounded theory slowly began to take shape and form into something more tangible and understandable.

Finally, the researcher considers that some of the techniques that sell grounded theory as a systematic methodology were not always easily practised in this case; theoretical sampling requires a great deal of time and full use of this in addition to concurrent data collection and analysis was not manageable, and, theoretical saturation was more of a goal than a reality (Willig, 2008). In any case it is wise to remember the limitations of the findings that have been generated, along with the strengths, “theories generated from GT are interpretations made from given perspectives as adopted or researched by researcher’s and are fallible” (Clarkson, 1998, p.210).

## 6.6 Validity

As previously mentioned, measures were taken to attend to the researcher’s influence on the data (see reflexivity), but attempts to ensure study validity were not deemed helpful. The researcher did not ask for transcripts to be coded by another person, because this would lead to new constructions of the data, and this research did not intend to be generalizable. Similarly, the researcher did not ask participants to review categories post interview to see whether they considered these an accurate reflection of their experience, because categories were formed alongside other participant’s data (constant comparison). The researcher did however invite participants to add anything or adjust anything on reading their transcription should they wish. None of the

participants chose to amend anything captured at interview, however several expressed that it was a useful record of their experience.

## **6.7 Literature review (and restraint)**

Use of the existing literature was minimal prior to conducting this research, in line with grounded-theory principles (Fassinger, 2005). These principles recommend minimising the researcher's exposure to previous research and theoretical material before the developing theory is grounded in the research data, so that it does not get in the way of discovery/construction. Later, literature can sensitise the researcher to dimensions of meaning (McLeod, 2003).

In practice, a number of issues arose in response to the researcher's attempt to reduce preconceived ideas. As Dey (1999) points out, an open mind does not imply an empty head, therefore pre-existing ideas will always be present and what the researcher already knows needs to be taken into account. In addition, Lempert (as cited in Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) sees that "literature provides parameters of understanding, and that without it, in our ignorance, we may report ideas as new that have already been developed" (p.20). The researcher grappled with some of these issues, including those more practical, such as the requirements to include a certain amount of relevant literature in her research proposal. Interestingly, observing this recommendation, as much as could be deemed possible or realistic, added experientially to the researcher's understanding of the studied phenomena, because the researcher for the most part stayed with the data without referring to the literature.

### **6.7.1 How the literature relates to the findings**

All of the literature reviewed was considered in relation to the findings. The researcher found that a great deal of this literature added to the study findings, either by supporting categories or constructs, or by developing them. On occasion, the literature could be interpreted in a way that challenged what had been found, or seen to neither support nor oppose the findings in any clear way. Such instances were considered an opportunity to look for challenges to the findings, and sometimes could be seen to correlate with the researcher's difficulty locating highly relevant literature.

The literature reviewed relating to the background and context of the counselling psychology discipline informed and contextualised the study findings. The illness versus well-being debate highlighted how a mainstream perspective in society can diminish or obscure alternative perspectives, including those that could helpfully foster the well-being of people. It highlighted how difficult it is to challenge a way of understanding people that has been long established and accepted. The tension between these different perspectives is mirrored in the trainee's struggle between different theories and sources of knowledge selected to help their clients in practice, as suggested within the category property *the trainee's experience of conflicting theories or proponents of theory*, in the *theory raises uncertainty in the trainee* category. Related themes from the study data that capture the full spectrum of trainees' perspectives were collected within *the trainee's philosophical perspectives and theoretical knowledge*, and, *the trainee's grasp of counselling psychology ethos* category properties. These properties developed from data concerning the trainee's wider outlook or worldview, their preference for approaches and orientations, their understanding about the counselling psychology context, and information about how their views changed over time.

The researcher notes that these study findings integrate background and context related data into the changing experience of the trainee, within categories *the trainee's relationship with theory*, and, *the trainee's personal and professional development*, whereas, there may be an argument for recognizing this sort of data more separately or independently from the trainee. This said, in the researcher's view trainees are inseparable from their social environment, as a number of authors such as Crowley (2010), would seem to support. Both the categories *the trainee's personal and professional development* and *the nature of the trainee's relationships* acknowledge the weight of these contextual influences, albeit in largely intrapersonal and interpersonal forms.

Literature on the background and context of counselling psychology by Pilgrim and Rogers (2005), describing a 'blocked dialectic' between disciplines, could be seen to support the findings. For example, should communication blocks occur within and not just between practitioners and disciplines, and a trainee's mental representations of a theory and their experience did not 'talk to one another', then this would offer one possible way of understanding of the process described by the category *the trainee's inability to perceive the impact of theory*. Following this idea further, trainees who were concealing experience with theory, might hold representations that talk passed one another. This way of looking at the findings could fit with the other categories also, for example, *relieving the impact of the trainee's experience*, sees the trainee consciously or unconsciously block the dialectic in order to become more comfortable, mentally. However, the difficulty with this abstract interpretation is that it pulls apart the trainee's mental representations of theory and experience and has them resemble opposing viewpoints, and this oversimplifies the case as the literature around knowledge and how the trainee makes sense indicates.

The background and context literature included the reminder that the study methodology was open to evaluation (see 6.5 for further discussion on methodology and method). The researcher appreciates the way grounded theory has evolved over time because this has given her the opportunity to attribute the study findings to her interaction with, and construction of, the data, while also recognizing that her contribution fits the time, place and cultural influences within which the research was conducted. This literature therefore marks a reflexive point about the research, and has the researcher face the challenging reality (because these study findings cannot be viewed as lasting) that it is likely that what is understood by ‘relationship with theory’ will change in meaning, both, in a different context, and as philosophical and methodological paradigms evolve.

The literature on becoming a counselling psychologist, such as that acknowledging the youth of the counselling psychology discipline within the applied psychology field, helpfully contextualized the findings and connected with categories thought to influence *the trainee’s relationship with theory (the trainee’s personal and professional development and nature of the trainee’s relationships)*. Douglas (2010) described the way that the DCoP members’ individual perspectives appeared to sit along a (socially influenced) continuum, and the researcher recognised this to be true also for trainees and their perspectives on their practice. For example, the impact of theory on the way that they made sense of their emotional responses ranged from revealing experience at one end, to raising uncertainty, then concealing experience, along to inability to perceive impact at the other end. This observation made by Douglas referred to the relevance of relationships with others in determining a person’s position on such a continuum, and this was a highly relevant finding seen in

the category properties *the trainee's experience of conflicting theories or proponents of theory*, and, *the trainee's relationship with their role models*.

The personal and professional development literature was largely supportive of the findings. This may be because the grounded theory included categories rich with information and themes around the development of the trainee psychologist, but made no detailed assertions about what such development should look like or include. Important ideas that were echoed in the findings included discussion about self-other boundaries by authors such as Risq and Target (2009). The property *the trainee's concern with issues of ownership or entanglement of emotional material in practice*, from *the theory raises uncertainty in the trainee* category, was how the data relating to this important feature of client work was finally constructed.

Both the findings and the literature indicated that learning about how to negotiate self-other boundaries was often managed by asking for help from others, and utilizing relationships with tutors, supervisors and personal therapists as role models (van Deurzen, 1998; Risq, 2009). Support from others was pivotal for the trainees in the process of making sense of their experiences in practice, as *the trainee's relationship with role models* indicates. This process was found to take time, as van Deurzen's (1998) account about learning professionally from events long past suggests, and it required sufficient self-awareness, which usually involved some personal change for trainees. Such personal development has been understood by some to enable the practitioner to intervene on the basis of their own experience rather than their theoretical position (van Deurzen, 1998), a viewpoint expressed by a number of the trainees at interview. These themes are visible in the properties, *it takes time for the trainee to incorporate theory*, and, *the trainee learns to trust their own experience*, both from *the trainee's personal and professional development* category.

The literature supported the idea that there is often the risk that trainees, in particular those early in their development, can succumb to their ‘blindspots’ and ‘defences’ when working with clients in practice, and as Tallis (1998) cautions, this can be at the cost of losing touch with ‘reality’. The relevance of this to the present study is that the category *relieving the impact of the trainee’s experience* might indicate that theory is used to guard trainees from the very thing they must learn to embrace and work with in practice.

A similar way to consider the category *relieving the impact of the trainee’s experience* came from exploring literature about making sense of experience. Heideggerian ideas suggest that facing existential anxieties could be more bearable to a person if they could be shared or carried by another (person, or theory). However, because of the lack of clarity in Heidegger’s use of language, these same ideas could be used to challenge the findings. For example, this study attempts to pick apart elements (experience/existence, others and theory, anxiety etc.) that are inseparable from Dasein therefore these findings could be no more than an elaboration of the researcher’s Dasein.

With regards to Heidegger’s concept that earned its way into the grounded theory in the form of the categories *theory reveals the trainee’s experience*, and, *theory conceals the trainee’s experience*, the study findings indicated that this dialectic was very important, but also that it was only part of the picture. Completing the picture (at least within the constraints of this piece of work) were the two further categories, *theory raises uncertainty in the trainee*, and, *the trainee’s inability to perceive the impact of theory*. In contrast, some of Kelly’s (1963) literature conflicted slightly with the way the researcher had understood the findings, for example his quote “it is the learning which constitutes the experience” challenges an assumed

order or shifts the ‘subject and object’ indicated by the common expression ‘learning from experience’. Similarly, Kelly’s theory raised questions around whether it is experience or personal constructions in action when *the trainee learns to trust their own experience*.

The research and literature around knowledge and knowing indicated that much remains uncertain about how we know. It was possible however for the researcher to understand that features of the present study did not lend themselves well to being made sense of (e.g. *the trainee’s inability to perceive the impact of theory* category). Consequently, acknowledging that there must be improvisations, dynamic knowledge and context-dependent understanding (Weissmark & Giacomo, 1998) in practice is important, and this fits well with the grounded theory generated, complete with its conditions and influences.

The literature on emotional response experiences was rich and interesting in its own right, however it could only add implicitly to the theory-focussed study findings. While no literature was found on the area, the trainee’s attachment style and their theory choice and use in practice would have been relevant and interesting. The researcher noted that literature on how emotions interact with our feelings and cognitions was inconclusive, and considered that this ‘not knowing’ was in keeping with the presence of the categories *the trainee’s inability to perceive the impact of theory*, and, *theory raises uncertainty in the trainee*. There was an absence of highly relevant discussion around emotion and this was thought to be consistent with the category *relieving the impact of the trainee’s experience*, and to be the case in part because emotions can be difficult and messy (Harris & Huntingdon, 2001).

Generally, emotions are regarded as a source of valuable information in practice, as implied within category properties, *the trainee learns to trust their own*



*experience, and, the trainee's concern with issues of ownership or entanglement of emotional material in practice.* They are frequently used as social and sometimes culturally specific tools, that work to reveal or conceal information and communicate messages (both clearly and unclearly) within relationships (Scolten et al. 2009, Tiedens & Leach, 2004).

Finally, reviewing the literature on theory involved looking at some of those theories that trainees had referred to during their interview. The researcher found it helpful to be mindful of her biases based on her own experiences with the theories in practice. Literature on countertransference, as anticipated, tied in with category property *the trainee's concern with issues of ownership or entanglement of emotional material in practice*, and Spurling's (1998) description of new therapists using their intellect to protect themselves from emotional impact in practice related very closely to data forming the category *relieving the impact of the trainee's experience*.

Literature on social and evolutionary theory questioned whether human nature was compatible with the therapeutic position due to our innate exploitativeness. Such an incompatibility was not studied or discussed with trainees, but this does not mean that social/evolutionary influences and similar constructs cannot or do not exist within *the trainee's relationship with theory*.

The literature on social perspectives of theory was informative, for example, when considering the way trainees would hold onto theory rigidly in an attempt to adopt the role of an informed and helpful therapist. Some trainees acknowledged reproducing language and behaviour that they considered appropriate for a therapist, but their need to do this diminished as *the trainee learns to trust their own experience*. Modelling themselves and their practice in this way was a way to reduce their anxiety and uncertainty (*relieving the impact of the trainee's experience*). There was also

support from the literature that trainees benefit from developing a reflective attitude, allowing them to consider the impact that their approach might have on their client and the quality of their therapeutic relationship.

The work of existential authors reviewed (van Deurzen, 1998; Yalom, 2001) was often reminiscent of participants' stories and experiences, and connected closely with themes from the category *the trainee's personal and professional development*. A property of this category, *grasp of counselling psychology ethos*, was highlighted within the work of several authors in their discussions on theoretical integration and the limitations of seeking one truth. Both the advantages and disadvantages of learning a number of different theories were acknowledged in the literature and findings, but a notable difficulty was thought to relate to the tendency for each therapeutic modality to exist within relative isolation (Evan and Gilbert, 2005). This could help us to understand something of the confusion and self-doubt experienced by trainees, also seen in the *theory raises uncertainty in the trainee* category property *the trainee's experience of conflicting theories or proponents of theory*.

The literature on the development of a theoretical orientation was of particular interest to the researcher, and many similar themes (e.g. 'influence' categories) were present in this area that overlapped with the present study. It should be noted that the development of a theoretical orientation was not what was being addressed by this study, but that it was about the part of the trainee (as practitioner and researcher) that asks what it means for them to have a theoretical orientation, and the personal and professional implications of their approach to their practice.

It was of great relevance that Arthur (2000) reported therapists' tendency to hold to their theoretical orientation, for two reasons. Firstly, such theoretical stasis may go some way to explain why the present research identified a category called *the*

*trainee's inability to perceive the impact of theory*, because it may be that commitment to one perspective is easier when regard for other perspectives is weaker. Secondly, Arthur's findings support ideas developed from the findings about having a relationship with theory, and the attachment to particular ideas and role models therein.

A fascinating feature of the trainee developing a relationship with theory is the way that theory (together with the influences that shape how it is interpreted) becomes integrated into the 'self.' Rumble (2008) makes the suggestion that we hold knowledge like a relationship, he states, "therapeutic knowledge is itself a kind of object relation which the therapist holds in mind within the setting" (p.70), and Risq (2008) continues this dialogue. This idea of embodying theory was introduced to the researcher by some of the participants. If *the trainee's relationship with theory* involves the absorption and integration of theory into themselves, then the property *awareness of when using theory limited* might refer to no longer being able to recognize theory as something distinct from their 'self'.

During the course of the research it became clear that the term 'relationship with theory' put theory into the context in which it must be investigated, that is, theory can only exist in the mind and practice of a person, who themselves exists within a social context. This research indicates that the trainee's awareness, understanding and interaction with theory changes with influence from key relationships, and changes over time with personal and professional development. Category property *it takes time for the trainee to incorporate theory into their practice*, is supported by the literature that describes the process of learning, and highlights the importance of timing in such a process. With this, Rogers (1951) suggestion that theory follows practice (a clear fit with the property *the trainee's position that theory is meaningless until it is*

*experienced in practice*) is a helpful summary of many of the trainees reported experiences.

In conclusion, when the time came to review the literature, post data analysis, it helped to confirm a core category and heavily supported other categories. It also offered a wealth of informative, albeit theoretically constrained, perspectives on and around emotional response experiences that help us understand the person who holds the relationship with theory. The researcher did not find that the literature reviewed could in any clear way ‘close down’ what the findings grounded in the data had ‘opened up’ about this scarcely researched area on the impact of our use of theory in practice, and she accepts that this may be because the findings are largely dynamic and flexible, not because they should be considered ‘truth’ or are irreplaceable.

## **6.8 Researcher reflexivity**

Some grounded theorists (Glaser, 2002) have argued that reflexivity is an unnecessary component of the methodology, and consequently, grounded theory has received criticism for its lack of researcher reflexivity (Willig, 2008). However, as indicated throughout, the researcher has considered it vitally important to acknowledge her part in the research process, and she considers this to be realistic, informative and in keeping with her chosen approach (Charmaz, 2006) to grounded theory.

The researcher locates herself in the same general context as the participants with whom this study was conducted. For her, training as a counselling psychologist took place between 2006 and 2011 in London, UK, where she became part of the first cohort on a university-run PsychD programme. As previously outlined, the researcher made use of practical measures including a research diary, pre and post interview

notes, and a colleague interviewing her with her research questions, in order to track and monitor her processing, ideas and own views on the research topics.

These measures reminded the researcher that she herself had felt confused about the meaning and usefulness of her emotional responses in practice, and recognised instances where she had been negatively or positively affected by client work. In particular, there were instances when she had felt poorly equipped to manage work with clients who had posed unexpected challenges, and this had motivated her to learn to better understand herself and others in the therapeutic context, and to look to theory as a means to achieve this. The researcher recalls having considered self-care a trainee's responsibility, but also having observed other trainees seek help and support from others more actively than she had in times of such difficulty. This might go some way to explain the researcher's focus or reliance on theory for 'support' during emotionally demanding situations in the work, and perhaps also her mistrust when experiencing such 'support' as having failed her when her understanding of it left her vulnerable (e.g. unconditional positive regard was found to be unhelpful working with a client who expressed violent sexual fantasies towards her). This description outlines the way that clinical experiences using theory, particularly those that evoke strong emotional responses (in the example given, fear, anger, disgust), can leave a strong and lasting impression on the practitioner.

The researcher began this study with preconceptions that theory could be confusing and sometimes very unhelpful in practice and viewed this simply as a critical and questioning stance; and now that the research is complete she has been able to adjust her perspective by recognising the pain behind her bias, and see her experience as a way of relating to theory in practice. The researcher learnt that theory cannot make sense of emotional responses to clients in practice alone, it depends on

careful and skilled application by a practitioner who has or is developing a high level of awareness about themselves and how they relate to the other – including the theory that they look to to work with them.

The researcher recognized that in conducting this research the boundaries between research and therapy needed to be defined, because interviews had the potential to become emotionally demanding and time-consuming for the participant and the researcher. Davis (2001) writes of negotiating her role and managing herself in the field when conducting her research, giving attention to the emotional implications of conducting her research (p.41). The researcher considered it an advantage to be familiar with the field, and be able to understand the language, thinking and experiences shared by the trainee counselling psychologists about their clinical practice. However, she was also aware that her researcher role required that she be ‘different’ to how she would be in her trainee role, which meant adjusting the way she thought about her purpose in being there and her style of communication during the interviews.

This dual role was also apparent to the researcher when participants would speak about experiences from their client work that provoked powerful emotional responses in them. At times participants would appear to relive some of the emotions as they retold their experiences, and the researcher’s instinct was to respond empathically, however she had to remind herself that her role was not one of therapist but of researcher, albeit a researcher with sufficient sensitivity. This meant that the researcher needed to manage her response to the participant’s emotional experiences in a way that was less therapeutic and more orientated towards thinking about them in relation to their client work. The researcher found this shift in roles confusing at times, particularly when she considered that she might be neglecting the trainee’s feelings.

Despite this, the participants did not show or report any distress as a result of answering the questions or sharing the emotional response experiences at their interview with the researcher.

This highlights a question about how possible it is that a researcher can immerse themselves in a culture with which they are familiar, such as the interview discourse with the participants, and remain a non-participant. Davis (2001) describes the need to consciously avoid the pitfalls of ‘going native’; likening this to the possibility that one might enter another’s world and lose sight of their own. This has several levels of meaning for the researcher, as it was necessary for her to be active in her researcher role while staying aware of her own trainee role during interview, but also awareness about the merging of ‘self’ into another’s world was particularly relevant because this was something that participants spoke about happening in their relationships with clients when trying to make sense of their emotional response experiences in practice.

#### **6.8.1 Process**

While the process of the relationship between researcher and participant overlaps and is encompassed within researcher reflexivity, this section places brief but direct focus on relationship.

Within each unique researcher-participant relationship, the researcher observed subtle relational dynamics that sometimes evoked thoughts and feelings in the researcher; these experiences were noted down after the interview and became integrated into the data in the form of memos. At times the researcher found that she identified with the participant, or felt empathic, or noticed their discomfort speaking, or their relief in sharing. She enjoyed hearing about trainee’s experiences, perspectives

and learning, and found it relatively easy to relate to them given her background in the field. However, as previously described, the researcher was conscious of different roles with herself; as researcher, she would sometimes notice herself anticipating the theoretical influence in the participant's descriptions, or use theoretical concepts in her mind to categorise spoken content. Whereas in other moments, as therapist perhaps, she felt fully engaged in listening to the participant's story, attuned and supportive of the trainee in their self-disclosures and active reflection. Of course it was not only the researcher who had to negotiate multiple social roles, as the participants might have assumed several different social roles themselves from which to communicate e.g. as a trainee, a research participant, a peer etc.

Interviewing the participants was enlightening; each trainee brought the research question to life in their own way, and the researcher valued being able to follow each participant's lead on what they considered to be important about this area. In the moments when participants were uncertain how to answer questions, the researcher wondered to what extent this was about their difficulty with the question (indicating interesting data), and to what degree this might relate to the researcher's uncertainty, or her approach to interviewing (e.g. sometimes the researcher noted having asked multiple questions at once which might have been confusing). This echoed a more common dilemma, relevant to this research and area of clinical practice, about attempting to distinguish between what is 'self' and what is other in the relationship.



### 6.8.2 Ethical dilemmas

The researcher could not predict the content of the personal experiences and accompanying material that trainees would share with her at interview. For ethical purposes trainees were advised to take care to protect their client's confidentiality when sharing their experiences at interview, and it was the researcher's impression that all trainees did this well, showing to be professional and experienced at doing so. However, the researcher must acknowledge the possibility that a trainee could have disclosed something that was of serious concern to her. For example, such a disclosure might denote a serious risk issue, such as a risk of harm to the client, another person in the client's life, or to the trainee therapist. Where there is a risk of harm, this might have been missed by the trainee, either due to their negligence or it might be that they themselves acted in a way that could be considered harmful or abusive. To consider this latter possibility further, a trainee might have disclosed a form of malpractice, for example, a sexual attraction towards a client that might have been acted upon in some way, or a clear expression of a prejudice against a client on the basis of their race, socio-economic status, disability, age or another difference. An ethical dilemma would also arise if faced with an indication of poor professional conduct, such as inappropriate sharing of confidential client details or data, or an overly intimate (or hostile) relationship with a person in a responsible position, creating a conflict of interests e.g. a supervisor.

The researcher must also acknowledge that because this was not where she was directing her attention or focus during the interviews, it is possible, while unlikely, that something of this nature could have been missed. Therefore researchers of similar topics should be mindful of the ethical issues and dilemmas that might become known

to them, and consider appropriate ways to address these dilemmas with their supervisors or the practitioners in question. Finally, what was not addressed as part of this study was how theory might be interpreted or used to justify ethically inappropriate or harmful behaviour on the part of the trainee therapist. This topic would make a worthwhile piece of future research, and be an interesting extension of the findings generated by this study.

## **6.9 Conclusion and suggestions for future research**

This study explored the interrelationship between experience and theory, by focussing on the impact of theory on the way trainees made sense of their emotional response experiences. While undertaking this research, the researcher noted that distinguishing theory as separate from the trainee who used and spoke about it seemed to unhelpfully fracture and disrupt what was happening and what was being described. Subsequently in the research process, the ‘impact’ categories were seen to be part of a wider process termed ‘relationship with theory’ by the researcher. The construct that is *the trainee’s relationship with theory* broadened the landscape of this study, and gave form to a more context-inclusive, process-orientated way to consider and investigate theory for the trainee counselling psychologist. All of the findings describe something important about the theory-experience interrelationship that has, as yet, received minimal attention from researchers.

In addition to counselling psychology practitioners and researchers, these study findings could be of value to those elsewhere in psychology, in psychotherapy and counselling, and also, it may interest those in relevant areas of education, sociology and philosophy. This research lays the foundation for researchers to investigate the relationship with theory further in order to develop our understanding about the nature of

knowledge in this area. Suggestions for future research might include, constructing a model on *the trainee's relationship with theory*, that explicates some or all of the social, personal development, and knowledge-related elements that are understood to be involved. Alternatively, future research might look further into the interactions of different forms of knowledge in the training of counselling psychologists or other therapeutic practitioners, such as, how experience may impact how theory is understood, or, whether a trainee's experience can be considered as separate to their experience of theory. An interesting study might be undertaken looking at the process of incorporation or embodiment of theory into the relationship with theory process. The suggestions made thus far refer to the trainee counselling psychologist or therapist, studied because of the change, adjustment, learning and development that occurs for them in their lives at this time in their training. However, a study with more experienced therapists' relationship with theory would also be of value to counselling psychology epistemology, and might indicate whether or not this process is more stable over time for such a group.

In conclusion, this study found that the impacts of theory on the way that the trainee makes sense of their emotional response experiences, included, revealing their experience, raising uncertainty about their experience, concealing their experience, and having limited awareness of theory. These impacts are influenced by social, personal and professional development, and epistemological qualities and processes of their relationship with theory at that time. This research indicates then that theory can be helpful and/or problematic to the trainee, depending on the extent of the impact(s) on their experience.

These findings will be useful to the reader if they use this grounded theory to reflect upon and critically analyse their own relationship with a theory (and that it may be a process applicable to all theories one encounters), rather than take on these

findings as if they were truth. Adopting this theory without question would be to miss its key communication, which is that while theory can helpfully reveal more about our experience, so too can it present us with problems that we must attend to and understand. The main problem with theory, from the researcher's perspective, occurs when our relationship with theory is such that we attempt to manage our uncertainty and our anxiety by using the theory to conceal our own experience.

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## **APPENDIX A:**

### **Interview Questions**

- **I would like to invite you to share your experience of an emotional response that you have had towards a client in your practice.**

*Followed up by timely and appropriate prompts, such as:*

- **What has helped, or has not helped, you to make sense of this experience?**

*If theory/theories are mentioned:*

- **What impact would you say this theory/these theories have on your experience?**

## APPENDIX B:

### Extracts of initial and focussed coding

Note: 'R' is used to abbreviate researcher; 'ER' to abbreviate emotional responses.

<b>Extract 1</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial, line by line coding with Participant A</li> <li>• Interview took place early in the research, pre-theoretical sampling</li> <li>• Extract taken from beginning of interview, after participant was invited to share an experience of having had an emotional response towards a client in practice</li> </ul>	
<b>Interview transcript</b>	<b>Initial coding</b>
Oh, well I don't know about a particular, well I think really the, I think that the subject's really relevant because I have emotional responses all the time (R: ok) to my clients in practice and it's always really like, relevant, you know what I feel in response to my clients (R: ...you say it's relevant to you?) yeah, well yeah if you're working psychodynamically I think it is really relevant, it comes up in supervision a lot erm, I suppose I have like positive and negative reactions to my clients, so I suppose the negative ones are more so the ones that maybe you remember (R: Mmm) or are the ones that are quite like more uncomfortable (R: Mmm) like I have, I've had clients that I've felt very frustrated with them or very, you know, really had a sense of feeling quite angry afterwards, but not really knowing where it's come from or why, why it's there and (R: Right) I did actually, when I read your, little, what you're doing, I did think, you know, that more so at the beginning of my training (R: Right) it was a shock to me at	<p>Unsure about identifying a specific experience.</p> <p>Expressing more general thoughts.</p> <p>Acknowledging relevance of subject to her.</p> <p>Frequent experience for her in practice.</p> <p>Stating belief that what she feels is relevant.</p> <p>Suggesting to R that question is relevant.</p> <p>R's clarifying question is affirmed.</p> <p>Theoretical model a condition/class of when ERs relevant. Supervision a place where ERs considered.</p> <p>Identifying types of ER.</p> <p>Considering the more memorable types of ER.</p> <p>Negative types of ER described as uncomfortable.</p> <p>Types of ER that produce more discomfort in her.</p> <p>Describing specific example of ER experience.</p> <p>Locating ER as being towards client.</p> <p>Time when ER experienced.</p> <p>Uncertainty about where ER originates from.</p> <p>Uncertainty about purpose of ER.</p> <p>Reference to R's advert.</p> <p>Locating ER with a time during training.</p> <p>ER that changes with time.</p>



<p>first I think how I felt after I'd seen people, and it took me a little while to really, erm, know how to deal with it in a way, (R: Ok) erm, 'cause if I saw three people in a row like, (R: Yes) then if it had been quite, if the sessions had been quite heavy I'd come out and I'd think gosh you know I feel so laden with all this stuff I don't quite know what I'm feeling, I think I feel really annoyed but then I, you know I think it went okay so why do I feel, you know, so, I think there was a lot of confusion for me (R: Right) at least, at the fact that my supervision was not very good, my supervisor was a very CBT anti-feelings person (R: Ok) so I didn't feel I could take, take my feelings erm there.</p>	<p>Recognising felt impact of seeing a client. Development over time. Becoming aware of how to manage ERs. Conditions/context of ER experience. Describing difficulty/demands of client sessions. Attending to ER after the work with clients. Describing ER/impact of client work. Confusion about what is feeling. Comparing/contrasting own feelings and thoughts. Questioning self and experience. Recognising own confusion. Stating dissatisfaction with supervision support. Attaching theoretical model to supervisor. Describing incompatibility with feelings. Explaining dissatisfaction. Believed unsupported with ERs.</p>
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## Extract 2

- Initial, line by line coding with Participant B
- Interview conducted later in the research, post-theoretical sampling.
- Extract from near the end of the interview after participant was invited to say more about the importance of the link between theory and experience

Interview transcript	Initial coding
<p>Oh yeah because otherwise...theories can be interesting, but, I think I started learning a lot more in my second year when I was doing clinical work because I didn't do much in the first year and it's only through the clinical work and linking practice to theory that theories came alive, because until I had that step, you could learn about attachment but until I've actually seen it in people, seen what avoidant is and seen what disorganised is, then it comes much more alive but without the</p>	<p>Affirming an important connection. Considering theory of interest. Considering theory's limitations. Locating a time of increased learning. Accumulating clinical practice. Using practice to bring theory to life. Temporal aspects of learning. Learning about theory. Seeing in people what has been theorised. Realising meaning of theory in practice. Clinical practice needed for making-sense.</p>

clinical practice the theories are just, on some level meaningless until I'd actually had clinical practice and seen what seems to happen, and I think god I really understand that now I can really see what disorganised looks like	<p>Theory meaningless without experience in practice.</p> <p>Learning through experience.</p> <p>Understanding theory from experience in practice.</p>
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<b>Extract 3</b>	
• Focussed coding with Participant A	
<b>Interview transcript</b>	<b>Focussed coding</b>
Oh, oh, well I don't know about a particular, well I think really the, I think that the subject's really relevant because I have emotional responses all the time (R: ok) to my clients in practice and it's always really like, relevant, you know what I feel in response to my clients (R: right, you say it's relevant to you?) yeah, well yeah if you're working psychodynamically I think it is really relevant, it comes up in supervision alot erm, I suppose I have like positive and negative reactions to my clients, so I suppose the negative ones are more so the ones that maybe you remember (R: Mmm) or are the ones that are quite like more uncomfortable (R: Mmm) like I have, I've had clients that I've felt very frustrated with them or very, you know, really had a sense of feeling quite angry afterwards, but not really knowing where it's come from or why, why it's there and (R: Right) I did actually, when I read your, little, what you're doing, I did think, you know, that more so at the beginning of my training (R: Right) it was a shock to me at first I think how I felt after I'd seen people, and it took me a little while to really, erm, know how to deal with it in a way, (R: Ok) erm, 'cause if I saw	<p>Trying to find a way to answer the question.</p> <p>A relevant experience.</p> <p>Conditions of the experience (ERs).</p> <p>Trying to make sense of the experience.</p> <p>Timing and development</p> <p>Impact of the experience.</p>

<p>three people in a row like, (R: Yes) then if it had been quite, if the sessions had been quite heavy I'd come out and I'd think gosh you know I feel so laden with all this stuff I don't quite know what I'm feeling, I think I feel really annoyed but then I, you know I think it went okay so why do I feel, you know, so, I think there was a lot of confusion for me (R: Right) at least, at the fact that my supervision was not very good, my supervisor was a very CBT anti-feelings person (R:Ok) so I didn't feel I could take, take my feelings erm there.</p>	<p>Uncertainty raised by the experience.</p> <p>The role of theoretical models.</p> <p>Needing support for the experience.</p>
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<b>Extract 4</b> <b>• Focussed coding with Participant B</b>	
<b>Interview transcript</b>	<b>Focussed coding</b>
<p>Oh yeah because otherwise...theories can be interesting, but, I think I started learning a lot more in my second year when I was doing clinical work because I didn't do much in the first year and it's only through the clinical work and linking practice to theory that theories came alive, because until I had that step, you could learn about attachment but until I've actually seen it in people, seen what avoidant is and seen what disorganised is, then it comes much more alive but without the clinical practice the theories are just, on some level meaningless until I'd actually had clinical practice and seen what seems to happen, and I think god I really understand that now I can really see what disorganised looks like.</p>	<p>Temporal aspects of learning relationship between theory and experience.</p> <p>Experience in clinical practice can be necessary to understand theory.</p> <p>Theory can be meaningless prior to clinical practice.</p> <p>Learning from experience.</p>



## APPENDIX C:

### Additional examples of coded interview transcripts

#### 1.

<p>I've been thinking about this actually a little bit, and therapy, personal therapy, it's not as though it's underestimated, but sometimes in these moments of intimacy, of, all the theory that we learn, it just sort of recedes, and okay maybe it should, or maybe it doesn't have such strength as in these moments of meeting, but what's there is my work with the therapist (LM: Mmm) erm which has a huge impact, all the different little models, supervisors in the past, supervisors in the present, some of tutors you know sometimes I hear their voice, or you know when I'm in an (?) then it's quite influential in a way I find myself inhabiting a similar subjectivity so to speak (LM: Mmm) you know and hearing myself through tutors voices and stuff, which is empowering in an experimental way, but yeah personal therapy it's very, dominates the whole scene though, this topography of different things, and ways of interpreting what's been happening, understanding what's been happening. So, learning to love my therapist (laughs) or learning to accept his love, has been, erm, a big piece of work, and I still haven't got there I don't think, I feel I close down a bit, I pick up on it sometimes...so that there are these moments of intimacy that I talk about in the group as well, erm, does that sort of answer....(LM: Yeah) sort of petering out there I don't know if I should get into what I wanted to say...</p>	<p>The place of theory in practice</p> <p>Theory recedes in moments of meeting with client.</p> <p>Awareness of the presence of learning from therapist.</p> <p>Theoretical influence from supervisors, tutors</p> <p>Experimenting with modelling self on tutors</p> <p>Believing that personal therapy dominates scene</p> <p>Recognising therapeutic learning about love, give and take in relationship</p> <p>Personal development, ongoing nature</p> <p>Speaking of intimacy</p> <p>Questioning relevance of contribution</p>
<p><i>LM: Well I'm really interested in, it sounds as though, people that you have relationships with in this context, particularly your personal therapist, sometimes the tutors from your training institution or supervisors that you've had, you take something, your learning perhaps, from them, (LM05: Mmm) rather than say from theory as such; it seems to be more that (LM05: Mmm) the relationships that you're learning from and that are informing your work at the moment, is that sort of what you mean...?</i></p>	<p><i>Importance of learning from relationships</i></p>
<p>Yeah, there's something sort of embodied you know there's the kind of experiential piece to</p>	<p>Seeing theory as embodied</p>

that isn't there (LM: Yeah) that the theory is there its present as I think the tutors are using the theory in themselves and they way they're with a group at a time, or can be, and so I guess there's a directive in there as well. The difficulty is that sometimes my therapist and the tutors are doing or saying different things (LM: Yes) so there's a kind of contrast there and it's well, sometimes after a training weekend and I'm thinking 'we don't do that in therapy!' 'ooh good to know I can get angry at my therapist...you're not doing it properly!' (LM: laughs) so yes I mean it's kind of....err...	<p>Directed by experiencing tutors who use theory</p> <p>Difficulty when therapist and tutors contradict each other in what they do or say</p> <p>Expressing that different information provides different theoretical rules</p>
<i>LM: I mean, that's very interesting how do you kind of grapple with that difference? How do you know which to do, what thing to challenge or...?</i>	
Yeah, yeah erm..	
<i>LM: Or do you...?</i>	
No I don't suppose I do really (laughs) I think I'm, there's something about presence, there's something about this erm embodied feeling that you get with a person that sometimes you get with clients, your own sort of intersubjectivity, your own subjectivity you've taken something out of that, that third part, that co-created part, and it's still rolling inside you, and it's influencing your thoughts and decision making. Sometimes when I reflect, I'm going off a little bit but it does answer your point I think, when I'm working with a client there are moments when I'm back home and if I'm sort of doing the washing up you know I'm just reflecting and stuff riling in my own thoughts. Stuff, very useful stuff comes up in my process, actually the client's process, and it helps me get a deeper understanding of where they are at, and there have been specific examples which I've written about in essays, actually I've used them in my research, about what happens to the relationship between sessions, and so, there's a freshness there, after a training weekend, spending three days with my tutors, you know there is an aliveness there that comes out, and with my therapist, well it's always quite difficult to spot because he's so bloody present but after 4 years of therapy he's in my dreams and he's in my sessions with my clients and so it's pretty well ingrained, that's your, kind of, therapist is just there, you know (LM: Mmm). So I suppose the therapist, the embodiment of	<p>Not knowing which guiding relationship/role model to follow</p> <p>Listening to own sense and experience in practice</p> <p>Embodied learning that is co-created intersubjectivity</p> <p>Considers is contributing indirectly to question</p> <p>Reflection on client work after session</p> <p>Benefits from connecting own process with clients process</p> <p>Using clinical work in academic training</p> <p>The therapeutic relationship between sessions</p> <p>Noticing freshness, aliveness in self after being with tutors</p> <p>Presence of therapist</p> <p>Internalising relationship</p> <p>Normalising embodiment of therapist and sometimes others</p>

therapist is the norm, and it's when other voices come in, my supervisor or whatever, I'm like 'Mmm, right...might have said that'...	
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## 2.

<p>I don't think there's a perfect training, erm and I think this is part of what we all experience when we all get to the end of it, we begin to see what we still have to learn, and the magnitude of that. I think actually that the training, I think, what I would have preferred to have done would be to have stayed initially with the techniques and the rules and the CBT, because I think when you're brand new, you kind of, it's quite nice to be able to hang your hat on something erm and provided you do that initial training where you learn to tend to the relationship, to start with CBT feels quite, feels more fitting, and then I'd have liked to have done the psychodynamic stuff, and then I really would have like to have done the person-centred training last because I feel that with the person-centred training that that, in a sense is, to a degree about letting go of, of, theory and that feels like a more appropriate path actually, erm, my research was in that area and I feel quite strongly that that kind of development of experience, erm, is about learning to let go, learning patience, learning to let go of certain things in order to be able to stay with the client, erm, and for things to become more intuitive, and I think actually the person-centred model gets, we lose a lot of that richness, by doing it first when we're all quite nervous, quite panicky, quite sort of overwhelmed, erm, yeah so I think maybe the order of things could have been more helpful.</p>	<p>Considers that there is no perfect training</p> <p>Realising learning does not end with training</p> <p>Fitting features of theoretical models with stages of learning as trainee</p> <p>Supports being taught techniques early, on condition relationship is not neglected</p> <p>Suggests re-order of models being taught</p> <p>Person-centred model viewed to be about letting go of theory</p> <p>Emphasises importance to her of learning to let go, being more intuitive</p> <p>Learning to let go of certain things in order to be with the client – prioritising relationship</p> <p>Suggesting that trainees' early anxiety can get in the way of learning</p>
<p><i>LM: ...I'm interested in the relationship between theory and the experiences that we have in practice, so how do you see them as manoeuvring around each other, do you see there as being an order to those or..</i></p>	
<p>Yeah I guess even thinking about the order of the models in which we are immersed, I think there's something about learning a discipline, and then learning when it is appropriate to, erm, to go with the flow, to be able to embrace the moment and to not get in the way of what's really going on and I think theory can do that, but I think it's important to reflect and learn these processes, I also think it's a privilege to be able to embrace each of the models in isolation, to be completely</p>	<p>Learning when it is appropriate to do what</p> <p>Theory can get in the way of experience with client</p> <p>Reflect, learn processes</p>

<p>immersed in, to be completely immersed in psychodynamic and so on, but still be held by a supervisor who knows what that's like somehow, and to be held firmly in that, yeah, and although a year's training in each of those is very little, there's something about the discipline which feels very important and then there's something about partly about being congruent and to being, being who you are erm as a therapist and bringing all that in as well, and I guess that comes with confidence and experience, and erm maybe there is a theory about that, I don't know, something about the freedom, you know I think it's been said by a tutor recently, at the end of day we're just two people in a room and actually it's easy to forget that, and with all the IAPT training there is a real nervousness in me that people can forget that at the end of the day this stuff has been going on since the ancient Greeks and before then, since humanity existed and actually it's very, very special in one sense, but it's very common in another sense, and actually the more I think about that in the moment the more I think actually we must not get too caught up in theory and highfaluting erm language and erm the kind of bridled sense of being, you know I'm thinking about a horse here, and being allowed to actually go with what is really going on, we can really stifle stuff and theory can really get in the way of what's really going on, yeah</p>	<p>Important to learn and reflect, practice and be held by supervision in each model</p> <p>Evaluating how trained</p> <p>Recognising personal (development) aspect</p> <p>Bringing yourself in as a person, as therapist</p> <p>Acknowledging there might be a theory about the use of self in work</p> <p>Concern that practitioners can lose the essence of relationship in the work</p> <p>History and context of this practice</p> <p>Special and also common practice</p> <p>Warns of getting caught up in aspects of role</p> <p>Emphasises not allowing ourselves to be stifled by theory</p>
<p><i>LM: Mmm hmm and when you say what's really going on, (laughs) is that the experience? Is that simply the two of you in a room, is that just simply getting it back to the basis the basics, I mean what do you mean by that?</i></p>	
<p>Well I guess it's two people trying to work out erm how one of those can find a way through pain or difficulty so can find a degree of healing, erm, and actually that might come from all kinds of things, including just being in the room, (LM: Yeah) erm yeah...yeah</p>	<p>Simplifying the practice again</p> <p>All sorts of things may help</p>
<p><i>LM: Yeah, that's really helpful, is there anything you want to add...</i></p>	
<p>Erm, well I'm conscious that, that's, I mean I think that sounds quite beautiful and erm, and actually I'm conscious that, that actually sometimes healing might not occur, but something else might happen, I don't know, I guess I'm conscious of it not being too tidy, or to end somewhere that feels too beautiful,</p>	<p>Clarifies that the process is not clear or predictable</p> <p>Allowing the experience to be imperfect Messy, or unknown</p>



because that's the ideal, erm, but I guess also, sometimes it might be messy, yeah..	
<i>LM: Right, right so something about it not being perfect, it can't, or necessarily..</i>	
Or known	
<i>LM: Or known...yeah</i>	
Yeah, yeah, and I guess that comes back to the theory as trying to 'know' everything, and to, you know and sometimes, maybe that's the intersubjectivity erm but you know sometimes erm yeah it's just better not known, or named..	Theory tries to know everything, sometimes it may be better not known or named.

## 3.

Yes it was rather impersonal, so I guess it wasn't particularly helpful. Also with your supervisor there is an element of, pride, not necessarily pride but although I did admit to her that I was finding it hard but I didn't let her see how hard I was finding it	Unhelpful supervision  Development of professional identity  Fearful supervisor doubts her ability, hiding true feelings
LM So as a trainee CP there is something about	
They're judging you, assessing you	Feeling judged
LM: You're trying to establish yourself as a professional, in the profession, what is that dynamic then? What's the difference in this supervisory relationship compared with one that really did work for you?	
Yeah. I think it just was, I don't know if it is the assessing thing I think it's the willingness to engage on that emotional level, that actually was what was missing and that supervisor for whatever reason wasn't yeah and perhaps I was more wary of being judged and having my work judged by the supervisor than with the uni group supervision lady.	Helpful supervisor shows willingness to engage on an emotional level.  Wary of supervisors judgement as trainee
LM There was a difference clearly for some reason, and judgment seems like a part of it. Do you think its anything to do with fact that one is in placement, one in university, or people that they are...?	
I think it might be to do with the people because I can think of other supervisors that would have dealt with it differently, and there would be other lecturers at the university that I would not open up to ...	Difference in supervision help for experience not about their environments but about the people/personal dynamics/relationship with them
LM Right right so it's not that okay	
I think it perhaps was to do with the personal dynamics, yeah I think so and the relationship that I had with each of those two people	Relationship with supervisor, personal
LM Mmm that sounds important then. I'm just going to ask you now about something you've already touched on and	Role of different theories in making sense of the experience

that is different models, and whether they are important here, you've mentioned psychodynamic and CBT orientations of supervisors, do you think theoretical model has any bearing on the making sense of these emotional responses, for this experience?	
That's an interesting one, because it has crossed my mind, and I know CBT therapists will say but we do consider the emotional impact but actually I don't feel that it is considered to the same extent, and I don't feel that it's attended to; I do think there is something about the psychodynamic way of looking at countertransference, I find it anyway extremely important as a way of understanding yourself, understanding your client and understanding the dynamic between you and what's going on. So I do think it's something to do with the model and yep I suppose I find that missing to some extent in my CBT work, although I guess I think about it but I don't necessarily use it or I don't talk about it in supervision, but I am probably making observations about what the emotional impact is for me	<p>Unpicking difference in how thinks and uses emotional responses in psychodynamic versus CBT practice</p> <p>Considers CBT does not consider e.r's to same extent as psychodynamic model.</p> <p>Praising psychodynamic model for understanding self, client and relationship between you.</p> <p>Notes she may think about e.r's in CBT practice but behaves differently.</p>
LM Do you feel that learning countertransference for example has enabled you to do that and take thinking about e.rs in to your CBT work, or is it kept in psychodynamic practice...	
That's interesting, maybe I wouldn't actually call it countertransference, if I'm not using it in the way that I would use countertransference or in the way that I would think about it, in CBT I might think about the emotional reaction that I had towards a client and then think about what behaviour they were displaying that caused me to have that feeling	<p>Changes language for ref to different models</p> <p>Adjusts interpreted meanings of e.r's for different models</p>
LM Can I ask what the difference is	
Yeah, actually that's a good question, what is the difference, erm the difference is that I perhaps don't think about the transference that they're, that is involved, I don't think about what role I might be playing for them or what role they're putting me in necessarily, I don't think about projective identification issues so that's a difference. I wouldn't necessarily attend to any of the physical stuff that I get or they get as countertransference or sensations, I notice far more in my psychodynamic work if I feel like I'm being sucked down a plughole or sleepiness or anything else	<p>In CBT would not consider roles she as therapist might be in with client, or attend to physical sensations, unlike psychodynamic work</p>

<p>LM ..and that's to do with how you would think and work with CT and psychodynamic work, when it comes to CBT and having an emotional reaction, I hear you say behaviours, is it more than just a difference in language, is it different way of thinking...in CBT what do you do with those emotional reactions if anything?</p>	
<p>Mmm ...I think I'd probably still mention them in supervision, in passing, and that would probably be about it. Yeah it's interesting and hard to think about it's so abstract it's hard to get straight in your mind, what do I do with it, do you know I don't really know...</p>	<p>Acknowledging difficulty of thinking about same experience across different theories</p>

APPENDIX D:

# MAKING SENSE

OF YOUR

## EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO CLIENTS

Would you be willing to discuss how you make sense of your emotional responses to your clients?

**If you would be willing to discuss your experience(s), I would be very interested in hearing from you...**

Participating in this research will offer you an opportunity to explore your experiences and the way you make sense of them, and you will be making a valuable contribution to knowledge in the field of counselling psychology.

My name is Lucy Manning, and I am a Counselling Psychologist training on the PsychD Counselling Psychology programme at Roehampton University, London. I wish to explore trainee's emotional responses to their clients, and how they make sense of these experiences. This is a qualitative study for my doctoral thesis, and is supervised by Dr Harbrinder Dhillon-Stevens, [H.Dhillon-stevens@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:H.Dhillon-stevens@roehampton.ac.uk)

I am seeking **Counselling Psychologists in their final year of training** to take part in a **1 hour** interview (including briefing and debriefing). The interview will be audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed using grounded theory. Anonymous extracts of your interview may be included in the final thesis.

If you would like to volunteer, or if you would like further information about this study then **please contact me** for further details.

**Researcher contact details:**

**Lucy Ann Manning**

PsychD Counselling Psychology, Human & Life Sciences,  
Roehampton University, Whitelands College, Holybourne Avenue, London, SW15 4JD

E: [manningl@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:manningl@roehampton.ac.uk)

**Thank you.**  
**APPENDIX E:**

## BRIEFING INFORMATION FORM

### **Brief Description of Research Project:**

This research is looking at trainee counselling psychologist's emotional responses to their clients, and how they make sense of their experience(s).

### **Investigator Contact Details:**

Name: Lucy Ann Manning  
 School: Human & Life Sciences  
 University address: Roehampton University, Whitelands College, Holybourne Avenue, London, SW15 4JD  
 Email: [manningl@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:manningl@roehampton.ac.uk)

Thank you for considering taking part in this research exploring trainee counselling psychologist's emotional responses to their clients, and how they make sense of their experience(s).

The following information outlines what will happen next should you decide to participate in this research, my responsibilities as the researcher, your rights as a participant, and what is expected of you if you give your consent to participate.

### ***Benefits to you***

It is hoped that, through discussion and reflection, you may benefit from a more 'revealed' sense of your experience, and with this, perhaps, a broader understanding of how experience and theory inter-relate in your practice.

### ***Taking part***

To explore trainee counselling psychologist's emotional responses to their clients, and how they make sense of their experience(s), you will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview that will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using a grounded theory methodology. Interviews will last 45 minutes, with 15 minutes for briefing and giving consent beforehand, and debriefing afterwards. I will allow an additional 15 minutes after debriefing, should you wish to discuss any concerns that might have arisen from the research interview. This would be an opportunity for you to discuss any issues arising from your participation in this research. It could be that discussing your experiences, particularly those of an emotional nature, might generate some anxiety or distress, and this additional time could be used to discuss suitable sources of support, such as personal therapy, should you need them. Details of professional sources of support are available on the debriefing form.

(Page 1 of 2)

### ***Confidentiality***

Every effort will be made to maintain your anonymity and a participant ID code will replace your name. All data (recording and transcription) will have identifying data removed, and documents with participant information (such as this form) will be stored securely and separately to the data. The recording and transcription data will

be stored on a password protected computer for 6 years in accordance with Roehampton University policy, after which time, all information will be destroyed.

Although I will make every effort to remove all identifying data (names, locations etc) said in interview, you are advised to not to say anything that will directly identify you, or indeed your clients during the interview.

Please be aware that once the research is complete, anonymised extracts from your interview may be included in the thesis. The thesis will be displayed in the Roehampton University library, and there is a possibility it may be presented in a journal.

### ***Participant's rights***

I would like to stress that you have the right to:

- Have the audio-recording stopped at any point during the interview
- Terminate the interview at any time
- Decline to answer any of the questions I ask you
- Read a copy of your interview transcript on request
- Withdraw from the research study at any time without giving a reason, and do this by using your ID code. It may be that some data is used in an aggregate form after you withdraw.

Please note: if you have questions about participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Director of Studies or the Dean of the School.

#### **Director of Studies Contact Details:**

Name: Dr Harbrinder Dhillon-Stevens  
 School: Human & Life Sciences  
 University Address: Roehampton University,  
 Whitelands College, Holybourne Avenue,  
 London, SW15 4JD  
 Email: H.Dhillon-stevens@roehampton.ac.uk

#### **Dean of School Contact Details:**

Name: Michael Barham  
 School: Human and Life Sciences  
 University Address: (as before)  
 Email: M.Barham@roehampton.ac.uk

## APPENDIX F:

### TRAINING INSTITUTION CONSENT FORM

Dear (Training Institution),

My name is Lucy Manning, and I am a Counselling Psychologist training on the PsychD Counselling Psychology programme at Roehampton University, London.

**I am seeking your consent to circulate the attached poster and briefing information documents in order to recruit participants for my doctoral research.**

I wish to recruit up to twelve final year trainee counselling psychologists to explore their emotional responses to their clients, and in particular, how they make sense of these experiences. This is a qualitative study and is supervised by Dr Harbrinder Dhillon-Stevens, [H.Dhillon-stevens@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:H.Dhillon-stevens@roehampton.ac.uk) Please see additional contact details for my Director of Studies and Dean of School on page two should these be of interest to you.

Participation in my study will involve a one hour interview (including briefing and debriefing). Interviews will take place in a suitably quiet location convenient to the participant – would it be possible to book a small room at the Institution for this to take place?

Interviews will be audio-recorded, and I will transcribe and analyse the data using grounded theory. Anonymous extracts of the interview may be included in the final thesis.

Please see the attached poster and briefing information sheet for further information. Ethical approval has been obtained (*when obtained*) from Roehampton University for this research and all its supporting documentation.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me using the details below:

Name:	Lucy Manning
School:	Human & Life Sciences
University address	Roehampton University, Whitelands College, Holybourne Avenue, London, SW15 4JD
Email:	<a href="mailto:manningl@roehampton.ac.uk">manningl@roehampton.ac.uk</a>

I would greatly appreciate any help you can offer with recruiting participants for this study.

**Please can I ask that you complete the consent statement on page two, if you are happy to do so.**

With thanks & kind regards,  
Lucy Manning

**Consent Statement:**

I have read and understood the above and attached information about this research study, and agree to circulate the poster and briefing information to final year trainee counselling psychologists at this training institution.

Name of Training Institution:

.....  
....

Name of member of staff at Institution:

.....  
....

Designation:

.....  
.....

Signature:

.....

Date:

.....

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study or any other queries please raise this with Lucy Manning. However if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Director of Studies or Dean of School.

**Director of Studies Contact Details:**

Name: Dr Harbrinder Dhillon-Stevens  
School: Human & Life Sciences  
University Address: Roehampton University,  
Whitelands College, Holybourne Avenue,  
London, SW15 4JD  
Email: H.Dhillon-stevens@roehampton.ac.uk

**Dean of School Contact Details:**

Name: Michael Barham  
School: Human and Life Sciences  
University Address: (as before)  
Email: M.Barham@roehampton.ac.uk



## APPENDIX G:

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

#### **Brief Description of Research Project:**

This research is looking at trainee counselling psychologist's emotional responses to their clients, and how they make sense of their experience(s).

Approximately twelve counselling psychologists in their final year of training will be asked to take part in a 1 hour interview (including briefing and debriefing). The interview will be audio-recorded. The researcher will then transcribe and analyse the data using grounded theory. Anonymous extracts of the interview may be included in the final thesis.

#### **Investigator Contact Details:**

Name: Lucy Ann Manning  
 School: Human & Life Sciences  
 University: Roehampton University, Whitelands College, Holybourne Avenue, London, SW15 4JD  
 Email: manningl@roehampton.ac.uk

Participant ID Code.....

#### ***Participant's rights***

I would like to stress that you have the right to:

- Have the audio-recording stopped at any point during the interview
- Terminate the interview at any time
- Decline to answer any of the questions I ask you
- Read a copy of your interview transcript on request
- Withdraw from the research study at any time without giving a reason, and do this by using your ID code. It may be that some data is used in an aggregate form after you withdraw.

#### ***The meaning of your consent***

By signing this consent form you are agreeing to:

- Participate in the audio-recorded interview
- Have your interview transcribed
- Have your transcript analysed and included in the research
- Give consent for your data to be included in the results, and in future publications

**Consent Statement:**

I have read and understood the above information and agree to take part in this research study. I am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Director of Studies or Dean of School.

**Director of Studies Contact Details:**

Name: Dr Harbrinder Dhillon-Stevens  
 School: Human & Life Sciences  
 University Address: Roehampton University,  
 Whitelands College, Holybourne Avenue,  
 London, SW15 4JD  
 Email: H.Dhillon-stevens@roehampton.ac.uk

**Dean of School Contact Details:**

Name: Michael Barham  
 School: Human and Life Sciences  
 University Address: (as before)  
 Email: M.Barham@roehampton.ac.uk

## APPENDIX H:

### DE-BRIEFING FORM

#### **Brief Description of Research Project:**

This research is looking at trainee counselling psychologist's emotional responses to their clients, and how they make sense of their experience(s).

#### **Investigator Contact Details:**

Name: Lucy Ann Manning  
 School: Human & Life Sciences  
 University address: Roehampton University, Whitelands College, Holybourne Avenue, London, SW15 4JD  
 Email: [manningl@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:manningl@roehampton.ac.uk)

Participant ID Code.....

Thank you for taking part in this research. Should you wish to spend some time talking about anything that came up from the interview, we now have an additional 15 minutes to discuss the study. Should you remember something later, I can be contacted using the number or email address above.

It may be that our interview has brought up some difficult feelings or memories for you. I am unable to offer a counselling session, but should any issue have arisen for which you may need more specialist support than I am able to offer, I would recommend that you take this to your personal therapist or supervisor where appropriate. You may also find the following contacts useful:

British Psychological Society (BPS)

Web: <http://www.bps.org.uk/bps/e-services/find-a-psychologist/directory.cfm>

Tel: 0116 254 9568

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

Web: <http://wam.bacp.co.uk/wam/SeekTherapist.exe?NEWSEARCH>

Tel: 0870 443 5252 or 01455 883300

United Kingdom Council of Psychotherapists (UKCP)

Web: [http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find\\_a\\_therapist.html](http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find_a_therapist.html)

Tel: 020 7014 9955